

# Head Lice Epidemics Are Breaking Out in Schools Across the U.S.

Head lice in children are rampant in schools throughout the country. The CDC reports that an [estimated](#) six to 12 million young people get head lice each year, and there are indications that these itchy bugs are growing widely [resistant](#) to the insecticides commonly used to treat them.

A head lice outbreak earlier this month in the Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, school district was called “[unprecedented](#),” as 100 children were found to have active lice infestations.

While head lice are nothing new and affect children regardless of socioeconomic status or geography, the recent uptick in lice outbreaks could be due in large part to new policy changes that encourage children to attend school with active head lice.

In 2015, the American Academy of Pediatrics (A.A.P.) issued a [report](#) on head lice urging school districts to abandon their previous “no-nit” policies that prevented children from attending school when they had active “nits,” or louse eggs. The A.A.P. argued that these “no-nit” policies potentially infringed on the civil liberties of students by keeping these children out of school for what is not technically an “infectious” medical issue. Lice infestations can occur when people are in close proximity, share articles of clothing, or otherwise come into contact with someone with active lice, but lice are not “infectious” in strict medical terms.

An October *New York Times* [article](#) on head lice reports: “The A.A.P. has fought hard against ‘no nit’ policies in schools, in the interest of reducing the school absence associated with head lice; [the C.D.C. agrees](#), and schools are increasingly

unlikely to exclude children for nits..."

These new lice policies can lead to widespread outbreaks, as schools often avoid checking for lice or notifying parents if there is an infestation. A *Washington Post* [article](#) this week on the topic reveals the current lackadaisical attitude toward lice: "Because of [the new policy], they no longer checked students, did not call parents to pick up their children and did not notify the parents there had been a report. My daughter's teacher did not send out a note, email or even include the infestation in the newsletter that week."

Parents are increasingly fed-up with these new school district policies that they feel contribute to mounting lice infestations. In Nevada this week, nearly 6,500 parents signed a petition demanding that the Washoe County School District change its new lice policy that the Reno Gazette-Journal [reports](#), "allows students with lice or louse eggs to ride school buses and participate in all activities even if lice are not treated."

A mom who treated her daughter for head lice 15 times in the last school year started the petition, frustrated by the new district policy that allows children with active lice to continue to attend school.

It really comes down to accountability. Lice can be a common part of childhood, but parents need to take responsibility for effectively treating their children's lice before sending them back to school, and school districts need to re-examine absurd policies that unnecessarily spread these bugs to others.