

## THE PRESSURE TO FUMIGATE

Parents who discover one or more family members harboring lice can become anxious and panicked. In their disgust, they believe their home needs to be "sterilized," and often turn to a professional exterminator. At the same time, they will call their child's school administrator and insist that he or she do the same.

School principals can minimize the problems with this scenario by knowing ahead of time that human lice do not infest the environment as do fleas, mites and other insects. They require a specific range of humidity and temperature, as well as frequent blood meals, to survive and breed. When a human head louse leaves the host it is either moving on to a new host, is dislodged, damaged or dying. Occasionally, hairs with viable nits will fall out and even hatch, given optimum conditions. But without a source of blood immediately available, a newly hatched nymph will soon die. **It does not take the services of a professional exterminator nor fumigation to deal with lice in the home or school.** Careful vacuuming of carpets, bedding and upholstered furniture is an effective way to pick up any stray lice or hair with a nit attached.

Knowing this information in advance, administrators are better prepared to persuade a distraught parent to approach matters in a safer, cheaper and more effective way. One should emphasize the importance of focusing on accurate diagnosis and appropriate treatment of infested individuals. With vacuuming as the best way to deal with the environment, parents should be assured that lice do not live or breed on family pets or hide in furniture, draperies or cracks in the floor. It is unlikely that once a louse is off a human host that it will live much longer than 12-15 hours. All energies should be directed to family members, all at the same time, all with thorough nit removal.

The Fall, 1988 issue of PROGRESS addresses the entire spray issue and includes a letter discouraging their use from the Centers of Disease Control in Atlanta. Still, however, many individuals and schools *do* use—and abuse—these environmental products, looking for a quick fix to a stubborn problem. Parents frequently purchase several cans and empty them onto their children's mattresses, pillows and other surfaces where the fumes can be inhaled over extended periods. In spite of the warnings, people report to us that they have even used these products directly on their children.

Many of the people who call the school because of head lice may not yet have spoken to an informed person on this subject. This puts administrators on the front line, able to provide important basic information and redirect the harried parent.

Educate.....  
don't fumigate.