

HEADLICE IN CHILD CARE POLICY

PURPOSE:

To outline recent facts and the recommended treatment and exclusion for children who have head lice and also give ongoing support to families experiencing issues with control of the problem.

IMPLEMENTATION:

Head lice continue to cause concern and frustration for some parents, teachers and children. This policy is intended to outline roles, responsibilities and expectations of the child care community to assist with treating and controlling head lice in a consistent and coordinated manner.

Whilst parents have the primary responsibility for the detection and treatment of head lice our centre will work in a cooperative and collaborative manner to assist all families to manage head lice effectively.

This policy draws on information obtained from the Information Pamphlet and Management Guidelines "Scratching for Answers"
(www.health.vic.gov.au/headlice)

FACTS ABOUT HEAD LICE

Head lice have been around for thousands of years. Any one can get head lice and given the chance, head lice move from head to head without discrimination.

Head lice are small wingless blood sucking insects. Their colour varies from whitish brown to reddish brown. Head lice only survive on humans. If isolated from the head they die very quickly, usually within 24 hours.

People get head lice from direct hair to hair contact with another person who has head lice. This can happen when people play, cuddle or work closely together. Head lice do not have wings or jumping legs so they cannot fly or jump from head to head. They can only crawl.

Many head lice do not cause an itch, so you have to **look carefully to find** them.

Head lice are found on hair itself and move to the scalp to feed. They have six legs which end in a claw and they rarely fall from the head. Louse eggs (also called nits) are laid within 1.5cm of the scalp and are firmly attached to the hair. They resemble dandruff, but can't be brushed off.

FAQ

Do head lice fly or jump?

Head lice do not have wings so they cannot fly. They can't jump because they do not have knees.

So how do head lice move around?

Head lice CRAWL very fast and require head to head contact for transmission. It is possible that because of the way young children play, head lice are seen more widely amongst young children than adolescents or adults.

Can head lice spread disease?

No. A head lice infection is not a life threatening health condition – like similar health conditions such as scabies, and ringworm, it is a parent's responsibility to treat and care for their child.

How long does it take a head lice to hatch?

The time from infestation to eggs hatching is usually 5 to 7 days

What are the symptoms of head lice?

Itchy scalp, white specks near the base of the hairs, lice may be found on the scalp.

Do head lice live in carpets, clothes, hats or sheets?

No. Head lice rarely fall from the head. They require blood to survive. Head lice feed 3-4 a day and without blood will dehydrate in 6 hours in a dry climate and 24 hours in a humid climate. An egg requires warmth to hatch and is the reason why they are laid close to the scalp. The further away from the scalp, the less likely they are to survive.

What treatment kills 100% of head lice or eggs?

There is no single treatment that kills 100% of head lice or eggs. Whichever treatment parents choose it can take time and persistence to get rid of head lice.

Is there a way to prevent head lice?

No, not that we know of. It's important for parents to check their child's head regularly with conditioner even when they don't think their child has head lice. There is no research to prove that chemical or herbal therapies can prevent head lice.

What are the treatment choice?

Non chemical – use conditioner and comb to remove the head lice and eggs; and repeat every 2 days until no live lice have been found for 10 days.

Chemical – treat and comb to remove head lice and eggs; repeat in 2 days.

How does the conditioner and comb method work?

It's a very cheap and effective way of finding head lice. Hair conditioner does not kill lice, but it does stun them for about 20 minutes, meaning they do not move around, and it is difficult for them to hang on. This gives you time to comb through the hair with a lice comb.

Should families treat everyone in the family?

It is important to check each family member, using conditioner and comb, for head lice but only treat those with live lice.

What should we wash or treat at the centre?

As head lice only live for a short time off the head, the only extra cleaning is to wash any pillow cases on the hot cycle or place in clothes dryer. Head lice combs can be cleaned in water hotter than 60 degrees.

Do children with head lice have to be excluded?

Under NSW public health guidelines, children with head lice are not excluded as long as head lice management is ongoing?

Can children catch head lice from our child care service?

Children do not catch head lice from a child care service; they catch it from other children when they gather together at child care services.

What if children wear each other's hats?

Research has shown that hats seem a highly unlikely source of head lice in child care services.

It is the expectation of parents/carers and families attending this centre that:

- Children's hair will be checked for head lice on a weekly basis, at home, using the recommended conditioner/combing method (see further details);
- That your child does not attend child care with untreated head lice;
- Regularly inspect all household members and then treat them if necessary;
- Parent/Carers will notify the child care service if their child is found to have live lice and advise when appropriate treatment was commenced;
- Children with long hair will attend child care with hair tied back;
- Use only safe recommended practices to treat head lice;
- Notify the parents or carers of your child's friends so they have an early opportunity to detect and treat their children if necessary;
- Maintain a sympathetic attitude and avoid stigmatising/blaming families who are experiencing difficulties with control measures;
- Act responsibly and respectfully when dealing with members of the centre and broader community especially around the issue of head lice;

To support parents/carers and the broader community to achieve a constant, collaborative approach to head lice management Elder Street Early Childhood Centre will undertake to:

- Distribute up to date and accurate information on the detection, treatment and control of head lice to parents and staff at the beginning of the year or more frequently if needed;
- Include information about head lice management in orientation and transition programs for new families/staff attending the centre;
- Include information and updates in our newsletter;
- Provide accurate advice and maintain a sympathetic attitude and avoid stigmatising/blaming families who are experiencing difficulties with control measures;
- Accept that the responsibility to exclude a child from the centre rests with the director or authorised supervisor;

- Only exclude children from childcare who have live insects;
- Accept the advice of parents that appropriate treatment has commenced;
- Encourage children to learn about head lice so as to help remove any stigma or bullying associated with the issue;
- Be aware of the real difficulties some parents may encounter and seek extra support if required;
- Review the head lice policy annually;
- Act responsibly and respectfully when dealing with members of the centre and the broader community especially around the issue of head lice;
- Continue to seek opportunities to increase our collaborative understanding of and response to managing head lice.

Developed:

9 April 2006

Source:

“Help! I don’t know what to do about HEAD LICE; A guide to dealing with head lice within a child care service”
Community Child Care Cooperative Ltd (NSW)