EDUCATE – EXCITE - EXCEL

HEAD LICE PROCEDURES

Rationale:
Students need to be excluded from school if they are found to have head lice.

Purpose:
To ensure all students are protected from an outbreak within the school.

Broad Guidelines:
1. Students who are found to have head lice must be excluded from the school until effective treatment has taken place.

2. Students are excluded only if found to have live head lice.

3. When there is an outbreak of lice, a letter will be sent home to the parents of children in that class.

4. Information is published in the parent information booklet on treatment.

Conclusion:
It is important that procedure is followed to ensure all students and staff have minimal chance of infestation.
Dear Parents,

As you know, head lice are small insects that live in human hair. The eggs look like grains of salt stuck to the hair and most often found behind the ears and along the forehead and temples.

Head lice are very common, particularly in schools where children often have their heads close together.

Head lice can live in the cleanest hair. They don't make you sick, but can cause itching, especially in children, so you may have noticed your child scratching lately.

It is very important to check the rest of the family and other close contacts for head lice too. Please tell other people your child spends time with so they can have their hair checked.

If you find your child has headlice, it is important that you keep you child away until treatment has begun. Your child can return to school the next day after you have started the head lice treatment, even if there are a few eggs left.

As many eggs as possible must be removed, but some will be hard to pick off. A few remaining eggs are not a reason for your child to stay away from school. However you need to keep picking them out every day and repeat the treatment following the instructions carefully.

If you want more information or help, you can make a time to see the Community School Nurse or telephone the Communicable Disease Control Unit on 9388 4868.

Please check your child’s hair every day!

Yours sincerely,

Paul Andrijich
Principal
Caversham Primary School
Insecticide Treatment for Head Lice

There are three groups of insecticide (i.e. permethrin, pyrethrin and malathion) which have been shown to be effective and safe for treatment of head lice. Some other treatments may not have been properly tested and may be ineffective, expensive or even unsafe. Check the product labels for active ingredients.

**WARNING** – to avoid adverse reactions the following people should not routinely use insecticide head lice treatments:
- babies under 6 months.
- people with asthma, epilepsy, insecticide allergies, scalp conditions or very sensitive skin.
- women who are pregnant or breast-feeding.

**People who cannot use insecticides** should use the 10 Day Hair Conditioner Treatment instead (see previous page).

**Some key points to remember about insecticides:**

1. **No insecticide is guaranteed to kill all eggs.** Eggs which are not killed or removed manually will hatch 7-10 days after being laid. The hatchlings should be combed out daily using hair conditioner as they may be transferred to other children. Hatchlings will mature after about one week and start laying more eggs, continuing the cycle.

2. **Following insecticide treatment, remove as many remaining eggs as possible with your fingernails.** Use a magnifying glass in strong light, and concentrate on ‘live’ eggs, which are found within 1 cm of the scalp.

3. **If insecticide alone is used then treatment should be applied on Day 1, Day 7 and Day 14 to kill any hatchlings before they mature and lay more eggs.** Otherwise, if the hair is combed daily with hair conditioner for 10 days to remove the hatchlings, then the second and third insecticide treatments can be omitted.

4. **To prevent skin irritation,** do not repeat insecticide treatment more than 3 times, one week apart.

5. **Insecticide resistance.** Head lice that are resistant to an insecticide will still be alive the morning after the insecticide treatment, providing the insecticide was properly applied. If this happens, you should thoroughly wash out the first insecticide and retreat the same day with another insecticide from a different group (i.e. permethrin, pyrethrin or malathion), not just a different brand of the same insecticide. Alternatively, change to the 10 Day Hair Conditioner Treatment Instead.

**How to use insecticide treatment:**
- Rinse out any hair conditioner before using the insecticide as it may inactivate the insecticide.
- Lift the hair in sections, and saturate it with insecticide, combing through with an ordinary comb from the scalp to the ends of the hair. Work from the back of the head to the front. Pay particular attention to treating behind the ears, at the nape of the neck and close to the scalp. Leave the Insecticide on for the time recommended on the label, then wash out. Section the hair again and comb through with a metal fine tooth ‘nix’ comb to remove dead lice and eggs.
- Check that the head lice are actually dead. Do this straight after the recommended treatment time and again the next morning. It may take a few hours for all the lice to die. **Remember**, if any head lice are found alive the next morning, re-treat the hair the same day with another insecticide from a different group (i.e. permethrin, pyrethrin or malathion), not just a different brand of the same insecticide. Alternatively, change to the 10 Day Hair Conditioner Treatment.
- Check all other household members for head lice infestation using the hair conditioner method described on page 3.
10 Day Hair Conditioner Treatment for Head Lice

Head lice can be more easily removed by applying plenty of hair conditioner to dry hair before combing to remove live lice and eggs (nits). Any type of hair conditioner may be used, including generic ‘home’ brands, together with a metal fine-tooth ‘nit’ comb.

**How does it work?**

The hair conditioner works by immobilising the lice so that it is easier to trap them in the teeth of the comb. Without hair conditioner to slow them down, lice can be difficult to catch – they can run about 30 cm in 60 seconds. Hair conditioner also reduces friction, making combing easier, especially when using the metal fine-tooth ’nit’ comb. Even if only one or two lice are missed, they can lay about 6 eggs per day, and the cycle of infestation will continue.

**Why the 10-day treatment period?**

Generally, eggs (nits) will hatch 7-8 days after being laid on the hair shaft. However, some researchers have found that a few eggs may hatch as late as 9-10 days after being laid. The 10-day period is therefore recommended as the most effective time to break the reproductive cycle of the head lice.

**What to do:**

- Apply plenty of hair conditioner to the dry hair until saturated.
- Comb through with an ordinary comb or brush to remove tangles.
- Section and comb the hair thoroughly with a metal fine-tooth ‘nit’ comb in 4 directions – forwards, backwards, left, and right.
- Wipe the comb on a white paper towel to check that the dark adult lice or the paler hatchlings are being removed. Hatchlings are young lice which emerge from eggs. You may need to use a magnifying glass and a strong light to see the lice and eggs.
- Using white hair conditioner may make it easier to see the head lice.
- Rinse the hair conditioner out and dry the hair.
- Repeat this process daily for 10 days to cover the hatching period of the eggs.
- This removes the hatchlings which emerge from missed eggs.
- Check your findings for adult head lice each day after commencing the 10-day combing period. If any are found this will be a new infestation. You will need to start again from Day 1, as new eggs may have been laid.
- Check for lice reinfection once a week for at least 4 weeks after completion of the 10-day treatment. Hair conditioner makes the inspection easier.
- Check all other household members for head lice infestation using the method described above.

**How to remove eggs:**

Some eggs will be removed by combing, but others are harder to detach. You may need to use your fingernails to remove as many eggs as possible from the base of the hair shaft near the scalp.

Remember, only those eggs within 1cm of the scalp will hatch. Those eggs which have grown further out with the hair shaft will already be hatched or dead.
Household Cleaning

Head lice and eggs do not live away from the human scalp so it is not necessary to wash all the household linen or clothing, to vacuum, scrub or spray the house with insecticide, or to treat the dog or cat. Pillowslips and towels may be soiled with head lice debris including droppings and moulted lice skins, so they should be washed on the first day of treatment.

Exclusion from School

Under the School Education Act 1999, a principal may exclude a child with head lice from school until treatment has commenced. The Department of Health recommends exclusion at the end of the school day. The child may return to school when all live head lice have been removed. A few remaining eggs are not a reason for continued exclusion. However, the parent must continue treatment until all eggs and hatchlings have been removed, usually over the following ten days.

Prevention

Useful activities and ideas to help prevent infestation:
- check your child’s hair every week for head lice and eggs (‘nits’) - use a metal fine tooth ‘nit’ comb and plenty of hair conditioner to make the task easier and more effective. To help children sit still for this, offer distracting activities, e.g. play a favourite video, provide games, encourage reading, offer a head massage.
- tie long hair back - braid and/or put it up if possible.
- consider applying hair gel or mousse - these do not prevent or repel lice but help to keep stray hair strands from contact with other heads.
- avoid sharing combs or brushes.
- regularly immerse brushes and combs in hot water for 10 minutes to kill any head lice or eggs trapped in them. An old toothbrush will also help remove any debris.
- remind your child to avoid head-to-head contact with other children, e.g. when working at the computer with others, or when playing, or hugging.

Repellents

There are no known repellents which have been tested and shown to discourage head lice.

Products including head bands and caps impregnated with insecticide may have some insecticidal effect when head lice come in contact with them. However, these products need to be worn all the time and like all head lice insecticides, do not kill all head lice eggs. The insecticide may also cause skin irritation.

‘Trouble-shooting’ Checklist

If treatment is unsuccessful, check the following:
- Did the chosen treatment cover the 7-10 day hatching cycle of the eggs?
- Were the comblings examined for adult head lice (indicating reinfection) over the 10 day period?
- Were as many eggs as possible removed every day?
- Was hair conditioner applied to dry hair, not wet?
- Was sufficient hair conditioner applied to saturate the hair?
- Was insecticide (if used), applied exactly as instructed, particularly for the recommended application time?
- Was a metal fine-tooth ‘nit’ comb used?

Further Information

Contact your Community (School) Nurse for further assistance – the school office will have a contact phone number

If all else fails

Contact the Communicable Disease Control Branch of the Department of Health, Western Australia on 9388 4999 or e-mail your enquiry to headlice@health.wa.gov.au

This fact sheet is available at www.health.wa.gov.au/headlice