

Head Lice Policy

The occurrence of head lice is the most common insect infestation in humans and occurs mainly in children of primary school age. However, head lice infestation may affect people of any age, nationality, gender or socio-economic status. If not well managed, it is as much an educational issue as a health or social one as it can lead to a child missing significant learning.

Head lice do not pose any serious health risks but they are highly transmissible and management needs to be vigilant and ongoing. Whilst schools have a responsibility for minimising risk, parents have the major responsibility for prevention, detection and treatment of head lice for their own child/ren.

The school is committed to:

- minimising outbreaks of head lice
- supporting children's learning by reducing the number of absences and therefore immediately reporting live lice to parents of child/ren infested
- reducing stigma associated with infection
- maintaining confidentiality of infected children

The school will:

- follow an accurate and consistent policy to managing head lice, that is approved by the school council
- obtain informed written consent of parents/guardians prior to children being inspected for head lice at the time of enrolment
- exclude infected children until the day after treatment has commenced
- sight proof that treatment has been commenced

Parent/Carer consent

A pro forma consent form:

- obtains parent/guardian consent to head lice inspections
- should be provided to parents for completion as part of enrolment
- must be updated when:
 - guardianship or custody arrangements change for the child
 - parents/guardians no longer wish to consent to inspections
- applies for the duration the child is at the school.

Visual head lice checks

When a staff member or child is suspected or reports of an infection, the child will be sent to First Aid. Checks for head lice occur via:

- visual checks without physical contact:
 - do not require parent/guardian consent
 - are made by people authorised by the Principal, e.g. classroom teachers.
- head lice inspections involving the examination of a child:
 - require written parental consent, usually obtained at enrolment
 - are made by people authorised by the Principal and school council e.g. qualified first aider, teacher or nominated member of staff.

Exclusion of children

Children identified with live head lice should be:

- provided with a note to take home to inform the parent/carers that their child may have head lice at the conclusion of the school day
- excluded from school until the day after treatment has commenced, as set out in the Health (Infectious Diseases) Regulations 2001, School Exclusion Table

Note 1: Principal has the overall responsibility to exclude a child from school.

Note 2: The presence of eggs in the hair is not a cause for exclusion. There is no requirement for a general practitioner or local council to issue a clearance certificate in order for the child to return to school.

Detection and treatment responsibilities

Responsibilities for managing head lice are shared between: parents/guardians, schools and Principals.

Parents/guardians have primary responsibility for detection and treatment of head lice. Parents/guardians should:

- regularly, preferably once a week, check for lice or eggs in the hair of:
 - their child
 - all household members
- notify the school:
 - if their child is affected
 - when treatment commenced
- not send their children to school with untreated head lice.
- provide proof that treatment has commenced by submitting the treatment notification form

Schools must:

- exercise sensitivity towards children and families with head lice
- maintain children confidentiality to avoid stigmatisation
- support and provide practical treatment advice to parents/guardians.

Principals must:

- alert parents/guardians of an infestation, particularly the parents of other children in the same class as the affected child/children
- use discretion about informing the school community about an infestation.

Note: The Department of Human Services indicates at any one time there are likely to be cases of head lice in most schools, so it is not advocated that the Principal informs the whole school community each time head lice are detected.

Related policies

- Infectious Diseases

Related legislation

- Health (Infectious Diseases) Regulations 2001