

HEAD LICE POLICY

Head lice continue to cause concern and frustration for families, educators and children. Although head lice are not considered a health hazard, and do not spread disease, infestations can cause anxiety for all stakeholders. Head lice affect all socioeconomic groups and are not a sign of poor hygiene. They have no preference for ethnic background, hair colour, hair type or age. This policy is intended to outline roles, responsibilities and expectations of the Service to assist with early identification, treatment and control of head lice in a consistent and coordinated manner.

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

PURPOSE

To ensure parents, staff and educators are well informed about the early identification of head lice and managing infestations through effective treatment and communication with families.

Our Service aims to

- outline the roles and responsibilities of families, educators and management who are involved in early detection, treatment, and control of head lice
- document effective treatment and management strategies and
- provide information and support for families.

SCOPE

This policy applies to children, families, staff, management, and visitors of the Service.

HEAD LICE

Pediculosis Capitis or head lice are insects that live in hair and suck blood from the scalp, usually causing itching of the scalp. Female head lice lay their eggs and glue them to the base of hair shafts. The eggs (nits) are pale cream to yellowish brown in colour and hatch after 7–10 days. The immature lice grow into adults over 6–10 days and start biting the scalp to feed on blood. Adult lice mate, the females lay more eggs, and the cycle continues.

People get head lice from direct head to head 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.

Head lice do not live or breed on animals, bedding, furniture, carpets, clothes, or soft toys. They are rarely spread by sharing hats. Head lice can be controlled through a consistent, systematic community approach.

Finding Head lice

Head lice do not necessarily cause an itch, and may be difficult to observe. Look for eggs by shining a strong light on the hair near the scalp, or by using the conditioner and combing technique. (See Treatment section below)

Head lice are found on the hair shaft itself and move to the scalp to feed. They can be brown or grey in colour. Head lice 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.

IMPLEMENTATION

Responsibilities of Management, Nominated Supervisor, Responsible Persons and Educators

If one child at the Service has head lice, it is likely that several others also have them. To help prevent the spread of head lice our Service will:

- remind parents to be vigilant in checking for head lice
- confidentially notify the parent/caregiver of a child who is suspected of having live head lice and request that the child is treated before returning to the Service the following day
- keep families informed if there is someone at the Service with head lice, ensuring confidentiality is not breached by discloses the child's name who has head lice.
- support parents and children who have head lice by providing factual information, reducing parental anxiety and not singling out individual children with head lice
- ensure that the child or children with head lice are not isolated or excluded from learning
- provide families with suggestions of effective treatment for head lice
- encourage parents to tie back children's hair when attending the Service if there is a case of headlice
- record all cases confidentially so an outbreak can be avoided or minimised
- encourage children to learn about head lice so as to help them understand the issue and how to prevent further outbreaks- eg: avoid sharing hairbrushes and hats

Responsibilities of families

- Check your child's head once a week for head lice
- Notify the Service immediately if head lice are found on your child's head
- Ensure you check all members of your family if one person has head lice (there is no need to treat the whole family, unless they also have head lice)
- Ensure your child does not attend the Service with untreated head lice. If you find any live lice or eggs (nits), begin treatment immediately and notify the Service if your child is affected so the Service can monitor the number of cases and act responsibly.

- Check for effectiveness of the treatment every 2 days until no live lice are found for 10 consecutive days. Remove eggs (nits) from your child's hair using the conditioner method and head lice comb.
- Once treatment has started, your child can attend the Service.
- If your child has long hair, ensure this is tied back
- Families will only use safe and recommended practices to treat head lice
- Families will maintain a sympathetic attitude and avoid defaming/blaming families who are experiencing difficulty with control measures.

TREATMENT

The two most common methods used for the treatment of head lice are the conditioner/combing technique and chemical treatments.

Conditioner and Combing Technique

Conditioner stuns lice and blocks their breathing pores. This, together with the slippery effect of the conditioner, makes it easier to mechanically remove the lice.

1. Untangle dry hair with an ordinary comb
2. Apply hair conditioner to dry hair (white conditioner makes it easier to see the eggs). Use enough conditioner to cover the whole scalp and all the hair from roots to tips.
3. Use an ordinary comb to evenly distribute the conditioner and divide the hair into four or more sections using hair clips.
4. Starting with a section at the back of the head, place the teeth of a head lice comb flat against the scalp. Comb the hair from the roots through to the tips.
5. Wipe the comb clean on a tissue after each stroke and check for head lice or eggs on the tissue.
6. Comb each section twice until you have combed the whole head. If the comb becomes clogged, use an old toothbrush, dental floss or a safety pin to remove the head lice or eggs.
7. Wash out the conditioner.
8. Clean the comb using hot soapy water and rinse off with hot water.
9. Repeat the conditioner and combing method after seven days to ensure that any immature head lice that have hatched are removed before they can lay more eggs.

Chemical treatments

There are four main categories of head lice products available in Australia which may include an active compound which kills head lice and some eggs (nits). Any head lice treatment product used should carry an Australian Registered (AUST R) number on the outer packaging indicating the product is accepted by the Therapeutic Goods Administration for supply in Australia. No treatment kills all eggs so the hair must be retreated after 7 to 10 days to kill any head lice that may have hatched or survived the first treatment.

There are many different chemical products available to use for children aged over six months- check with a pharmacist to help choose a product. No single chemical treatment will work for everyone and lice can develop resistance to the chemicals.

NEW SOUTH WALES (NSW)

- NSW Department of Education
- <https://education.nsw.gov.au/student-wellbeing/health-and-physical-care/health-care-procedures/conditions/head-lice>

Source

Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority. (2014).

Better Health Channel. (2019). Head lice (nits) [Fact Sheet].

<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/head-lice-nits?viewAsPdf=true>

Early Childhood Australia Code of Ethics. (2016).

Guide to the Education and Care Services National Law and the Education and Care Services National Regulations. (2017).

Guide to the National Quality Standard. (2017).

National Health and Medical Research Council. (2012) (updated June 2013). *Staying healthy: Preventing infectious diseases in early childhood education and care services.*

Privacy Act 1988.

Revised National Quality Standard. (2018).

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