



# HEAD LICE

## POLICY

### **Rationale:**

- Head lice (pediculosis) are tiny insects that live on the human scalp where they feed and breed. Probably between 2-3% of primary school children are infested at any one time\*. While they do not carry or transmit disease, they are a cause of head itch and scratching, and can create high stress levels with social stigmatisation with families and in school communities.

### **Aims:**

- To minimise outbreaks of head lice.
- To respond to reports of head lice quickly and effectively.
- To ensure effective processes for treating head lice are well known and consistently followed.
- To ensure that parents and guardians are well informed about head lice and their treatment.

### **Implementation:**

- Anyone can catch head lice. Head lice cannot fly, hop or jump. They spread from person to person by head to head contact, and may also be spread by the sharing of personal items such as combs, brushes and hats. (See Department of Health: Scratching from Answers Appendix A)
- While it is parents who have the primary responsibility for the detection and treatment of head lice on their children, the school will assist by offering up-to-date information, by offering a screening process, and by alerting parents of lice when detected.
- The school will ensure all teachers and aides are provided with professional development regarding head lice, who will then be authorised to carry out visual checks of students heads for head lice. The principal will identify specific staff members to carry out head lice inspections (physical examinations) of students head and hair for the presence of head lice.
- The school will ask parents to sign a permission form allowing their children to be inspected by our staff members for the presence of head lice. Only children whose parents have returned the permission form will be inspected, however, all students may be visually checked. (see Appendix B below).
- All children inspected will be provided with a confidential report indicating to parents the results of the inspection (see Appendix C below), as well as advice on the latest information regarding head lice. This information will also be available on the school website
- Consistent with Health (Infectious Diseases) Regulations 2001, the school will ensure that the parents of any child found to have live lice are informed, that their child is to be excluded from attending school until appropriate treatment has commenced. (students may be treated one evening and return to school the next day and that the presence of eggs in the hair is not cause for exclusion. Parents/guardians need to be aware that one treatment is not sufficient to manage the problem. If a student re-attends school with live head lice the school may again exclude the student until the live insects have been removed.)  
In the event, that a parent is unavailable to collect child, the child's emergency contact will be notified.
- The school will also provide parents of children found to have live lice with information about head lice treatment and prevention
- Upon their return to school, parents of excluded children must present the signed declaration. (see Appendix D below) indicating that appropriate treatment has commenced.

All excluded children to undergo another inspection from our staff upon recommencement of school.

- Mortlake College in a commitment to help reduce stigma and maintain confidentiality following head lice inspections, e.g. a letter (Appendix C) will be given to all students involved in inspections, not just those found to have head lice
- The school will ensure that information relating to the prevention and eradication of head lice (will be appear in the school newsletter the beginning of every year and more frequently if required) appears throughout the year in the school newsletter, particularly at times of heavy infestations. This information will also be available on the school website and the Department of Health website. <http://www.health.vic.gov.au/headlice/>
- In addition Mortlake College advice to parents/guardians to follow the below procedures:
  - regular (preferably once per week) inspection of their child/children's hair for lice or lice eggs (using conditioner and a head lice comb is the most effective method)
  - regular inspection of all household members followed by treatment if head lice are detected
  - upon detection of head lice, notify the school and advise when treatment has commenced.

**Evaluation:**

- This policy will be reviewed as part of the school's three-year review cycle or if changes are required.

This policy was last ratified by School Council in....

**September 2018**

# Head lice Scratching for Answers?

health

## Frequently asked questions

### Where do head lice come from?

Head lice have been around for thousands of years. As with any insect, they learn to adapt to their environment in order to survive. We are never going to be completely rid of them, but we can make managing them easier.

### 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 primary school children than adolescents or adults.

### Can head lice spread disease?

No. Head lice cannot transmit or pass disease on to people.

### Who is responsible for checking and treating head lice?

Like similar health conditions such as scabies, and ringworm, it is a parent or guardian's responsibility to treat and care for their child.

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

No. Head lice very rarely fall from the head. They require blood to survive. Head lice feed three to four times a day and without blood, will dehydrate in six 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.

### Is it true that head lice only like clean hair?

No. Head lice are not selective. They don't care if hair is long, short, blonde, brown, washed this morning or last week. As long as they are warm, and have blood to drink, then they are content.

### What treatment kills 100% of head lice or eggs?

There is no single treatment that kills 100% of head lice or eggs. Whichever treatment you choose it can take time and persistence to get rid of head lice. Use a method that will not risk the health of your child.

### Is there a way to prevent head lice?

No. It's important to check your child's head regularly with conditioner and comb even when you don't think your child has head lice. There is no research to prove that chemical or herbal therapies can prevent head lice.

### 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 fine tooth (head lice) comb.

### How does a chemical treatment work?

Only use products that are licensed or registered for head lice. There are four different active chemicals that target head lice, each works differently and aims to kill lice and/or eggs.

## APPENDIX B CONSENT FORM TO CONDUCT HEAD LICE INSPECTIONS

### Permission to cover the duration of the student's schooling at:



**MORTLAKE COLLEGE**  
10 Hood Avenue P.O. Box 84 Mortlake 3272  
Phone: (03) 5599 2204 Fax: (03) 5599 2503  
email: [mortlake.p12@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:mortlake.p12@edumail.vic.gov.au)

Throughout your child's schooling, the school will be arranging head lice inspections of students.

The management of head lice infection works best when all children are involved in our screening program.

The school is aware that this can be a sensitive issue and is committed to maintaining student confidentiality and avoiding stigmatisation.

The inspections of students will be conducted by a trained person approved by the principal and school council.

Before any inspections are conducted the person conducting the inspections will explain to all students what is being done and why and it will be emphasised to students that the presence of head lice in their hair does not mean that their hair is less clean or well kept than anyone else's. It will also be pointed out that head lice can be itchy and annoying and if you know you have got them, you can do something about it.

The person conducting the inspections will check through each student's hair to see if any lice or eggs are present.

Person's authorised by the school principal may also visually check your child's hair for the presence of head lice, when it is suspected that head lice may be present. They do not physically touch the child's head during a visual check.

In cases where head lice are found, the person inspecting the student will inform the student's teacher and the principal (**insert other(s) if required**). The school will make appropriate contact with the parents/guardians/carers.

Please note that health regulations requires that where a child has head lice, that child should not return to school until appropriate treatment has commenced. The school may request the completion of an 'action taken form', which requires parents/guardians/carers to nominate if and when the treatment has started.

Parent's/guardian's/carer's full name: .....

Parent's/guardian's/carer's full name: .....

Address:..... Post code:.....

Name of child attending the school:.....

I hereby give my consent for the above named child to participate in the school's head lice inspection program for the duration of their schooling at this school.

**Signature of parent/guardian/carer:** ..... **Date**.....

**Signature of parent/guardian/carer:** ..... **Date**.....

*Please inform the school if guardianship/custody changes for your child, as this form will need to be re-signed to reflect these changes. Please also inform the school in writing if you no longer wish to provide consent for the school to undertake head lice inspections for your child.*

**APPENDIX B**

**HEAD LICE MANAGEMENT AGREEMENT  
BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND PARENTS/GUARDIANS/CARERS**



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Head lice continues to cause concern and frustration for some parents/guardians/carers, teachers and children. Head lice do not transmit infectious diseases – they are transmitted by having head to head contact with someone who has head lice. Whilst parents have the primary responsibility for the detection and treatment of head lice, the control and management of head lice infections is a shared responsibility amongst a number of agencies, including the Department of Education and Training; Department of Human Services; schools and parents. The Department of Education and Training is responsible for providing advice and support to schools regarding head lice management.

This agreement outlines the:

- Responsibilities of both the school and the parent/guardian/carer;
- Importance of an all inclusive health approach, to ensure an appropriate and efficient solution to the problem of head lice.

***Responsibilities***

**Parent/Guardian/Carer** - responsibilities include:

- Regularly (preferably once a week) inspecting their child’s hair to look for lice or lice eggs and regularly inspecting all household members and then treating them if necessary;
- Ensuring their child does not attend school with untreated head lice;
- Using safe treatment practices which do not place their child’s health at risk (see the attached *Treating and Controlling Head Lice* pamphlet).
- Notifying the school if their child is affected and advising the school when the treatment has started via an *Action Taken* form;
- Notifying parents or carers of your child’s friends so they too have the opportunity to detect and treat their children if necessary.

I have read and agree to the above responsibilities:

**Signature of parent/carer/guardian:** ..... **Date**.....

**Signature of parent/carer/guardian:** ..... **Date**.....

**School** - responsibilities include:

- Distributing policies and information on the detection, treatment and control of head lice to parents/guardians/carers and staff and having accessible clear protocols for the inspection program that the school implements;
- Developing a school policy on head lice which reinforces an accurate, consistent approach to the management of head lice infections, which is approved by the school council;
- Obtaining written parental consent to conduct head lice inspections, upon the enrolment of a student to cover the duration of their schooling at a particular school and to nominate a trained person/s to conduct the head lice inspections, who is approved by the Principal and school council;
- Encouraging those person’s authorised by the school principal, e.g. teacher, to visually check a student’s hair, i.e. with no physical contact with the child, if the presence of head lice is suspected;

- Encouraging parents/guardians/carers to continue to regularly (preferably once per week) check their child for head lice and providing a sympathetic attitude and practical advice to those parents experiencing difficulty with the control measures;
- Encouraging students to learn about head lice so as to help remove any stigma or 'bullying' associated with the issue;
- Being aware that the responsibility to exclude a child from a school rests with the principal or person in charge of the school and being aware that exclusion only refers to those children who have live head lice and does not refer to head lice eggs; and being aware of the recommendation that students should be excluded from school at the conclusion of the school day where the student should be provided with a note to take home to inform the parent that their child may have head lice.
- Being aware that there is no requirement in the *Health (Infectious Diseases) Regulations 2001* for a child treated for head lice to obtain a clearance certificate to be issued either by a general practitioner or a municipal council, on return to school.
- Where appropriate, and at the principal's discretion, providing an alert notice to the school community, when head lice has been detected in the school;
- Encouraging parents/guardians/carers to identify treatment used and the commencement date, via an *Action Taken form*.

Mortlake College is committed to managing head lice in a sensitive and confidential manner. We are committed to the above responsibilities.

**Signature of Principal** ..... **Date**.....

## APPENDIX C



MORTLAKE COLLEGE

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email: [mortlake.p12@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:mortlake.p12@edumail.vic.gov.au)

### ***They're Back .....***

Dear Parents/Guardians/Carers,

It has come to my attention that some students in the school may have head lice and I seek your cooperation in checking your child's hair this week (insert date \_\_/\_\_/\_\_ to \_\_/\_\_/\_\_).

Head lice do not transmit infectious diseases – they are transmitted by having head to head contact with someone who has head lice. You may be reassured to know that head lice are commonly found in places other than at Mortlake College. Head lice are common in school-aged children and are the most adaptable of creatures. They have survived living solely on humans for 10,000 years!!!!

#### What can you do?

I seek your cooperation in checking your child's hair and in those instances where head lice or eggs are found, treating your child's hair.

Please see the attached pamphlet *Treating and Controlling Head Lice*, from the Department of Human Services. This pamphlet has informative guidelines regarding detecting and treating head lice and eggs.

#### How do I treat my child for head lice?

The attached pamphlet (as noted above) has informative guidelines regarding detecting and treating head lice and eggs. The school also has additional information available regarding treatment and controlling head lice. Please don't hesitate to contact Mortlake College on, 03 5599 2204 to obtain this information.

#### If head lice or eggs are found on your child's hair you need to inform:

- the school and advise when the treatment has started, via the attached *Action Taken Form*.
- parents or carers of your child's friends so they too have the opportunity to detect and treat their children if necessary.

#### When can my child return to school?

Health regulations requires that where a child has head lice, that child should not return to school until the day after appropriate treatment has started. Please note, this refers only to those children who have live head lice and does not refer to head lice eggs.

**Mortlake College is aware that head lice can be a sensitive issue and is committed to maintaining your confidentiality.**

Kind regards

Signature of Principal (or relevant other)

Date.....

**APPENDIX D**



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Dear Parent/Guardian/Carer,

Head lice or eggs are suspected to have been detected on your child and it is very important for you to treat your child as soon as possible, using safe treatment practices. Please see the attached pamphlet, *Treating and Controlling Head Lice*, from the Department of Human Services. This pamphlet has informative guidelines regarding detecting and treating head lice and eggs.

It is very important for you to notify Mortlake College and to advise when appropriate treatment has commenced.

It is important to note, that health regulations require that where a child has head lice, that child should not return to school until treatment has started. Please note that this refers only to those children who have live head lice and does not refer to head lice eggs.

Please complete the below form and provide this to the General Office at Mortlake College on the return of your child to school.



.....

**Action Taken – Student Head Lice  
Parent/Guardian/Carer Response Form**

To: Mortlake College,

**CONFIDENTIAL**

Student's Full Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Year Level: \_\_\_\_\_

I understand that my child should not attend school with untreated head lice.

I used the following recommended treatment for head lice or eggs for my child (insert name of treatment) \_\_\_\_\_.

Treatment commenced on (insert date) \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

Signature of parent/carer/guardian: ..... Date.....

# Treating and controlling headlice

health

While children are at school many families will have contact with head lice. The information contained here will help you treat and control head lice.

## Catching head lice

Head lice have been around for many thousands of years. Anyone can get head lice.

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.

## Finding head lice

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

Head lice are found on the 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 1.5 cm of the scalp and are firmly attached to the hair. They resemble dandruff, but can't be brushed off.

Lice can crawl and hide. The easiest and most effective way to find them is to follow these steps:

- Step 1** Comb any type of hair conditioner on to dry, brushed (detangled) hair. This stuns the lice and makes it difficult for them to grip the hair or crawl around.
- Step 2** Now comb sections of the hair with a fine tooth, head lice comb.
- Step 3** Wipe the conditioner from the comb onto a paper towel or tissue.
- Step 4** Look on the tissue and on the comb for lice and eggs.
- Step 5** Repeat the combing for every part of the head at least four or five times.

If lice or eggs are found, the hair should be treated.

If the person has been treated recently and you only find empty hatched eggs, you may not have to treat, as the empty eggs could be from a previous episode.

## Treating head lice

Treating head lice involves removing lice and eggs from the hair. There are two ways you can do this:

1. Buying and using a head lice lotion or shampoo, following the instructions on the product
2. Using the conditioner and comb method (described under 'finding head lice') every second day until there have been no live lice found for ten days.

If you choose to use a head lice product always read and follow the instructions provided with the product carefully. The following points may also be helpful:

- Head lice products must be applied to all parts of the hair and scalp.
- No treatment kills all of the eggs so treatment must involve two applications, seven days apart. The first treatment kills all lice; the second treatment kills the lice that may have hatched from eggs not killed by the first treatment.
- Cover the person's eyes while the treatment is being applied. A towel is a good way to do this.
- If you are using a lotion, apply the product to dry hair.
- If you are using a shampoo, wet the hair, but use the least amount of water possible.
- Apply the treatment near the scalp, using an ordinary comb to cover the hair from root to tip. Repeat this several times until all the hair is covered.

There is no need to treat the whole family - unless they also have head lice.

Concentrate on the head - there is no need to clean the house or the classroom.

Only the pillowcase requires washing - either wash it in hot water (at least 60°C) or dry it using a clothes dryer on the hot or warm setting.

## Testing resistance

Head lice products belong in one of the following categories depending on the active compound they contain:

- pyrethrins
- synthetic pyrethroids (permethrin, bioallethrin)
- organophosphates (maldison or malathion)
- herbal with or without natural (non-chemical) pyrethrins.

Insecticide resistance is common, so you should test if lice are dead. If they are, treat again in seven days using the same product. If the lice are not dead, the treatment has not worked and the lice may be resistant to the product and all products containing the same active compound. Wash off the product and treat as soon as possible using a product containing a different active compound. If the insecticide has worked, the lice will be dead within 20 minutes.

Any head lice product could cause a reaction and should be used with care by women who are pregnant or breastfeeding, children less than 12 months old and people with allergies, asthma or open wounds on the scalp. If you are unsure, please check with your pharmacist or doctor.

## Head lice combs

Combs with long, rounded stainless steel teeth positioned very close together have been shown to be the most effective, however, any head lice comb can be used.

## Head lice eggs

Head lice eggs are small (the size of a pinhead) and oval. A live egg will 'pop' when squashed between fingernails.



Dead eggs have crumpled sides and hatched eggs look like tiny boiled eggs with their tops cut off.

## Regulations

According to the Public Health and Wellbeing Regulations 2009, children with head lice can be readmitted to school or children's service centres after treatment has commenced.

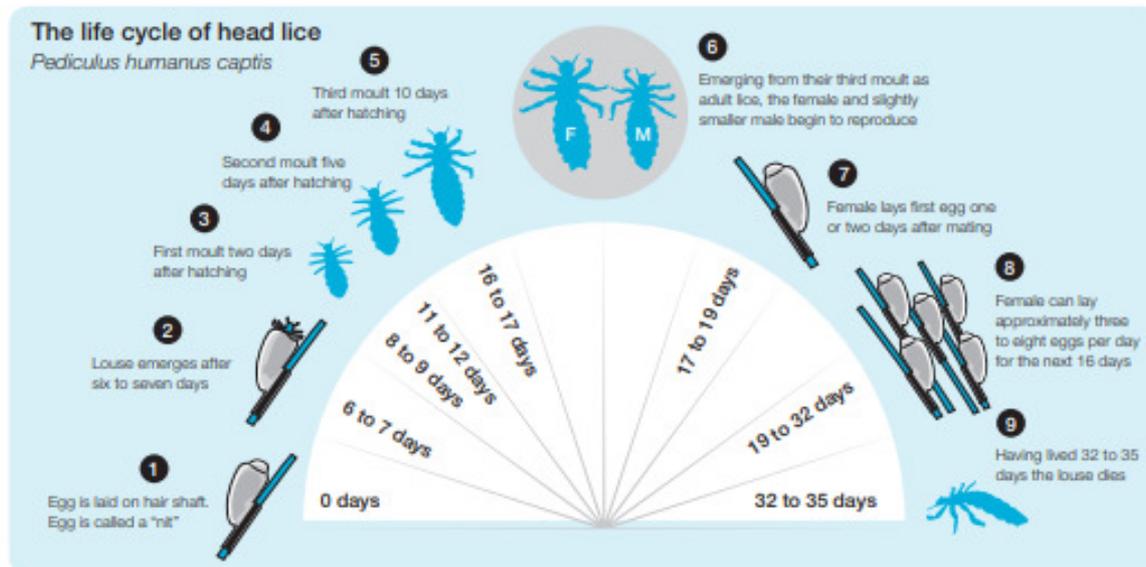
The department recommends a child with head lice can be treated one evening and return to school or children's service centres the next day, even if there are still some eggs present. There is no need to miss school or child care because of head lice.

## Preventing head lice

Check your child's head regularly with comb and conditioner. There is no research to prove that chemical or herbal therapies can prevent head lice.

## Further information

The following website offers further information:  
[www.health.vic.gov.au/headlice](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/headlice)



The information in this pamphlet is based on the research conducted and written by Associate Professor Rick Speare and the team of researchers at, School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, James Cook University.

Treating and controlling head lice

Cover concept by students from St Patrick's Primary School, West Geelong. Life cycle diagram courtesy of Nitpickers Qld.

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