



St. Matthew's National School

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HEAD LICE PREVENTION POLICY

Like the common cold, anyone can catch head lice. Recurrent problems with head lice create particular concerns for school, parents and the children. Head lice is an infection not just restricted to children. Adults also can be affected.

The true prevalence of head lice infection is probably lower than parental perception. However, head lice infections do generate considerable anxiety amongst parents and within school. It is unlikely that problems with head lice will ever be completely eradicated, but an approach which involves the cooperation of both school, parents and the community will in the long term help in controlling and limiting head lice infections.

A head lice infection is a community problem not a school one. However the school will support families in their efforts to eradicate the problem. Head lice spread very easily and can cause a lot of trouble and upset for children and families. One of the major frustrations with head lice is that once an infection has been successfully treated, there is no guarantee against re-infection soon after.

AIMS & OBJECTIVES

- To describe the specific policy for management of a head lice outbreak in school
- To ensure consistent advice and procedures are applied in all cases
- To raise awareness within the school community about the nature and management of head lice
- To ensure roles and responsibilities of parents, children and the school staff are defined and understood

PROCEDURES

- Parents are asked to notify the school if their child contracts head lice.
- Once head lice are detected in a class:
 - An information letter will be issued to parents without delay. In this letter, the school will provide information to parents on how to treat head lice.
 - Children will be asked to keep their coats (hats, scarves etc within sleeves of coats) on the back of their chairs to prevent cross contamination at the coat hook area.
- Following a second notification to a class in a term, a text message will alert parents regarding the matter.
- Should a class have repeated 'outbreaks' of head lice infections in a term (3 or more), the school will ask a specialised nit nurse to visit the school from a company such as 'The Head Lice Experts' to support the school and parents in tackling the matter.
- The school may consider using a bag in which children will store their hats and coats etc on their coat hook to help prevent cross contamination.
- If a child is in school with head lice repeatedly, the school reserves the right to ask that the child be treated as "sick" and kept at home until correctly treated.
- Once a term, the school will announce a "Bug-Busting Weekend" and request that all parents check/treat their children that weekend.
- Staff will deal with any outbreak of head lice with discretion and confidentiality.

STEPS SCHOOL TAKES TO HELP PREVENT HEAD LICE OUTBREAKS

1. In order to prevent head lice the school has added to its uniform policy the following statement:
Children with hair shoulder length or longer than shoulder length must have their hair tied back with a suitable hair accessory. This is for the health and safety of children during class lessons and during PE. It is also a measure put in place to prevent the spread of head lice in the school.
2. Children are not allowed to play with each other's hair (doing up hair styles etc) or to share hairbrushes etc.
3. Teachers will ask children with shoulder length hair or longer to tie up their hair in school.
4. The Head lice prevention policy will be available to parents on the school website.
5. Once a term, the school will announce a "Bug-Busting Weekend" and request that all parents check/treat their children that weekend.
6. A notification and check/treat procedure has been outlined in this policy.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARENTS

Parents are responsible for preventing, detecting and treating head lice infections in their families by arranging:

- To comb children's hair routinely to prevent the survival of lice. It is recommended to do this at least once weekly.
- To check hair regularly, i.e. undertake detection combing regularly for signs of infection once weekly and also to check amongst close contacts when informed of an infection.
- To undertake "contact tracing" among all members of the family who have had head to head contact with an infected person. Contact tracing means informing people about the head lice infection so they can do detection combing and treat if necessary. One of these close contacts is probably the source of the infection.
- To promptly treat any members of the family who have a head lice infection.
- To inform the school promptly if a school child is infected.
- To use proprietary lotions only as a treatment when an infection is present and not as a preventative measure.
- To ensure that their child's hair is either shorter than shoulder length or tied back with a suitable hair accessory.
- To take a 'community responsibility' approach to Head Lice, cooperating with the school by checking and treating hair when necessary and when requested.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SCHOOL

There are many ways and places in the community that head lice can spread, but schools are often the focus for parental and staff concern. The school will therefore:

- Making information available for parents on the prevention, detection and treatment of head lice both routinely during the school year and when there are problems in the community that are causing concern.
- To have a consistent approach to head lice infection, as outlined in this policy
- Stock leaflets and information about prevention, detection and treatment of head lice.
- Ensure children with shoulder length hair or longer have their hair tied back. Teachers will ask children to tie up their hair if required.

HEAD LICE – THE FACTS

- A head louse is a tiny six-legged insect whose size is between that of a pin head and a match head. It is greyish brown in colour but both the louse and the eggs it lays can change colour to match the hair colour of the host.

- Each leg ends with a claw that grasps the hair enabling swift movement close to the scalp. A louse does not walk on the scalp and has difficulty walking on flat surfaces.
- The louse feeds only on human blood, approximately five times per day.
- Females outnumber males in the ratio 4:1 and lay six to eight eggs daily.
- Lice like to be at a warm temperature so they live and lay their eggs in the warm zone close to the scalp & neck.
- The incubation period of the eggs is seven to eight days and within 7-14 days of hatching the louse becomes an adult, mates and the females start to lay eggs.
- Live eggs are skin coloured, whereas the cases of dead eggs (i.e. nits) are white and remain glued to the hair.
- Lice cannot hop, jump, fly or be drowned.
- Lice are not static and move very rapidly when disturbed.
- Itching may not begin for three to four weeks after lice arrive on the head.

Date of next review: April 2025

Passed by Board of Management:	April 2016
Amended	April 2020