



## **Shire Multi-Academy Trust Head Lice Policy**

### **Rationale**

The Shire Multi-Academy Trust is aware of the national problem of head lice and how it can sometimes affect children of Primary School age at school and at home.

This policy attempts to set out the duties and responsibilities of parents, the school and Health Authorities in dealing with head lice.

### **Role of Parent / Carer**

As the parent or carer of a young child:

- Undertake regular weekly and where appropriate, daily, checks to ensure that your child/family is not affected. This should be done with a detector comb. All family members should be checked.
- Inform all contacts/family/friends who may have come into head to head contact for a minute or more in the last month
- Seek advice from a medical practitioner (pharmacist/health visitor/Doctor) about using an approved lotion and treat using this method in the recommended way.

### **School will undertake to:**

- Provide regular information to parents/carers.
- Maintain a visual check on pupils.
- Alert individual parents, in a sensitive/private manner if a pupil is seen with live head lice.
- Request Parents treat the head lice immediately
- Invite individual parents to meet with the school nurse if a persistent case is noted.
- Offer support and advice with wet combing or other treatment.
- Keep individual cases confidential.

### **The school by Law cannot:**

- Carry out physical checks on pupils for head lice.
- Tell parents to keep children away from school because of head lice.
- Exclude a child from school because of head lice.

### **ADVICE SECTION**

#### **Facts about head lice:**

- Head lice are small, six-legged wingless insects that live on the hair close to the scalp where it is warm and easy for them to feed.
- They are pin-head size when they hatch, less than match-head size when fully grown and are difficult to see in the hair.
- The eggs are glued individually to hairs near the scalp. Un-hatched eggs are dull in colour and hard to see, but after the lice have hatched the empty egg sacs – called ‘nits’ – are white and easy to see. Many people mistake the empty egg sacs or nits for head lice when they are actually evidence of a previous infection of head lice.
- Head lice are easily missed in dry hair and do not necessarily cause itching. There are often only 10 lice or less on a head.
- Head lice can’t fly, jump or swim. They spread from person to person by climbing swiftly along hairs during close head to head contact.
- Head lice are not fussy about hair length or condition – clean hair is no protection.
- Head lice are not harmful.
- Head lice infection is common. Anyone with hair can get them, but children, who put their heads together a lot, tend to get them more often.

## Detection

Head lice can’t be prevented but regular checking ensures early detection and treatment if necessary. The best detection method is wet combing (see below). Parents and carers should aim to check their children’s hair once a week during hair washing. You need your usual shampoo, ordinary conditioner and a louse detection comb. Remember that you are looking for living moving head lice which is the only evidence that your child has a head lice infection. The comb must be fine enough to catch the lice. Your pharmacist should be able to recommend a suitable one.

## How to check

Good lighting is important. Look for lice by parting hair in small sections, going from one side of the head to the other. Check carefully, looking close to the scalp. Lice are most predictably found on hairs at the nape of the neck and behind the ears, where they are protected from extremes of light and temperature. However, they may be laid anywhere on the hair, especially in warm weather.

The appearance of a louse is often confused with that of a flake of dandruff or a dried particle of hairspray or gel. A distinguishing feature is that dandruff and hair products can be easily combed off the hair or removed with the fingers, while lice cannot. Lice are firmly glued to the hair and must be removed with a fine-toothed comb or fingernails, or snipped off with scissors.

The scalp should be examined in sunlight or under bright artificial light. The hair should be parted, with individual strands checked for lice. Head lice ‘hold on’ to the hair with hook like claws found at the end of each of their six legs.

## Treatment

So what should I do?

The only thing that really gets rid of head lice is good old fashioned elbow grease. There are two treatment options. The first is the wet combing method as set out below. ***Wet combing is by far the most effect method.*** The other is to use an insecticide lotion.

- Buy a nit comb from the chemist or on-line (they are available on prescription too).
- Buy the biggest bottle of the cheapest hair conditioner you can find and use the wet comb method.

- Treatment is also available free of charge at the pharmacy. Simply ask for 'Pharmacy first head lice treatment'

## Wet combing

### What is the Wet Combing Method?

With a little time and effort you can get rid of head lice safely, cheaply and without using any chemicals. This method is very safe. It is cheap and works well. All you need is your large bottle of hair conditioner, a nit comb and some time and patience. (It is best to ask someone to help you).

- Wash the hair with your usual shampoo
- While the hair is wet, apply plenty of hair conditioner
- Comb the hair using a fine nit comb.
- Comb from the roots upwards
- Check the comb for live lice and clear them away after each sweep
- Carefully comb all the hair, a little at a time
- Check all family members at the same time and arrange treatment if lice are found.
- **Repeat this every 3 days for 2 weeks to get rid of any newly hatched lice.**

If you discover head lice, inform any close contacts, so they and their families know they should check too. The time required to wet comb the whole head can range from 2 minutes for short, straight hair to 30 minutes for long, curly hair.

## Lotions

You can ask your school nurse, health visitor, pharmacist or doctor about which lotion is most effective. People with asthma or allergies, pregnant or breastfeeding mothers, and parents or carers of very young children should always ask their doctor or pharmacist about which treatments are safe for them.

Note the following advice for using lotions:

- Do not use lotions unless you find a living, moving louse. Head lice may become resistant to lotions if they are used too often.
- If live head lice are still being found after two treatments, ask your doctor, pharmacist, health visitor or school nurse for advice.
- Follow the instructions on the packet carefully. These will tell you how to apply the lotion, how long to leave it on the hair and when any repeat application is required for the treatment to be effective. The treatment method may vary between lotions.
- Although the lotion will kill the lice it will not kill the eggs. You will need to apply the lotion again after 7 days to kill any newly hatched baby lice. Again, this procedure may vary between different lotions, so follow the instructions on the packet carefully.
- Treatment does not prevent infections.
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## Tips:

- Head louse eggs take up to 10 days to hatch. Baby lice take 6-14 days to become fully grown, and it is after this that they will take the opportunity to move from head to head during close contact. Younger lice tend to remain for a minimum of 6 days on the head where they have hatched.

- Treatment is only needed when a thorough check detects live lice. Insecticide lotions, rinse, mousse or shampoo should never be used preventatively – doing this may help the lice to become resistant to treatment.
- Beware of mixing your own potion for treatment or repelling lice – it is unlikely to be effective and could be dangerous. In particular, essential oils, such as tea tree, must be used with extreme caution on children and pregnant or breastfeeding mothers. ‘Natural’ does not necessarily mean ‘safe’.
- Seek advice from your school nurse, health visitor, pharmacist or doctor about which treatments are effective – not all those on the market are. In particular, there is no evidence that ‘electronic zappers, tea tree oil or preparations that claim to contain insecticides of nature origin are effective.

## **Myths:**

### **Myth 1**

- *‘Nits prefer clean hair’*
- They are not bothered. Clean, dirty it’s all the same to them! It’s the hair and the scalp they go for, not the state it’s in.

### **Myth 2**

- *‘Nit nurses would reduce the problem’*
- They did not make any difference!
- The head lice population was unaffected by the careers of hundreds of ‘Nitty Noras’.

### **Myth 3**

- *‘This is the nit season’*
- There is no nit season. Head lice like the warmth of the human head and there is not much change to scalp temperature between summer and winter. They are a year round phenomenon.

### **Myth 4**

- *‘Adults do not get nits’*
- There is a bit of a truth behind this one. Head lice are less common in adults than children and more common in primary school than secondary school children but adults do get lice, as many teachers and parents can testify.

### **Myth 5**

- *‘Nits make your head itchy’*
- Not always! Some people have nits but no itchiness – some children who have a long term nit problem seem to become almost immune to the sensation of itching.