



Dean Bank Primary and Nursery School

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# Headlice Policy

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## **Aim of this policy.**

Dean Bank Primary and Nursery School is aware of the national problem of headlice and how it can sometimes affect children of a primary school age at home and in school. This policy aims to set out the duties and responsibilities of parents, the school and the Health Authorities in dealing with head lice and to provide guidance on the detection, treatment and prevention of headlice infestations. It sets out what school can and cannot do legally as well as providing some practical advice as to how to tackle head lice. At Dean Bank Primary and Nursery School our policy and procedures follow the most recent guidance available from NHS Choices (17th May 2016) (<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Head-lice> ) and Public Health England (1st April 2013) (<https://www.gov.uk/head-lice-pediculosis>).

## **Objectives**

- To inform parents and carers and relevant professional staff on the detection, treatment and prevention of headlice infestations.
- To encourage parental or self-inspection of hair for early identification of infestation.
- To minimise the social stigma associated with infestations.
- To ensure that accurate and consistent information and advice is available.

## **Background information (from NHS Direct).**

Headlouse infection is not primarily a problem of schools but one of the wider community. It cannot be solved by school, but the school can help the local community to deal with it.

Headlice are transmitted by direct, still, prolonged head-to-head contact.

Transmission of lice within a classroom is relatively rare. When it does occur, it is usually from a 'best friend'.

Headlice will not be eradicated in the foreseeable future, but a sensible, informed approach, based on fact not mythology, will help to limit the problem.

At any one time, most schools will have a few children who have active infection with headlice. This is often between 0% and 5%, rarely more. The perception by parents/carers however, is often that there is a serious 'outbreak' with many children infected. This is hardly ever the case.

## **Parents'/Carers Responsibilities**

As the carer of a child you should:

- 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 as noted in the advice in the school's parent leaflet on headlice and in this policy. All family members should be checked.
- Hair should be checked on the same day if text from school saying that there is a case of headlice in your child's class is received.
- If live headlice are found, prompt treatment should be given.
- Inform all contacts of the family / friends who may have come in to head to head contact for a minute or more in the last month if headlice or nits (eggs) are found.
- 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 information about Headlice on an annual basis and more regularly if many cases arise.
- Encourage parents to seek advice from the professionals if they find headlice to be a persistent problem.
- Maintain a visual check on pupils.
- Alert parents (class/year group) via a text if an outbreak is noted or school is notified by a parent that a pupil has headlice.
- Invite parents to meet to discuss treatment/ provide advice should parents wish.
- In some cases school (with the parent's permission) may then offer to provide assistance with wet combing and /or other treatment.
- Encourage parents to return their child to school immediately after treatment – there is no need to keep a child off school for the day.
- School staff will be encouraged to check their own hair regularly.

## **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. Unhatched 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 – 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 nits by parting hair in small sections, going from one side of the head to the other. Check carefully, looking close to the scalp. Nits 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 nit 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 nits cannot. Nits 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 nits. Head lice ‘hold on’ to the hair with hook like claws found at the end of each of their six legs.

# Treatment

## NOTES FOR FAMILIES

### Head lice: The Truth and the Myths

#### The lice

- Head lice are small insects with six legs. They are often said to be "as large as a match head". In fact, they are often not much bigger than a pinhead and rarely bigger than a sesame seed (the seeds on burger buns).
- They live on, or very close to the scalp and don't wander far down the hair shafts for very long.
- The louse's mouth is like a very small needle. It sticks this into the scalp and drinks the blood.
- They can only live on human beings. You can't catch them from animals.
- Nits are not the same thing as lice. Lice are the insects that move around the head. Nits are egg cases laid by lice, stuck on to hair shafts. They are smaller than a pinhead and are pearly white.
- If you have nits it doesn't always mean that you have head lice. When you have got rid of all the lice, the nits will stay stuck to the hair until it grows out.
- You only have head lice if you can find a living, moving louse (not a nit) on the scalp.

#### Who and where?

- Anyone can get head lice, but they are much rarer in adults.
- Head lice infection is a problem of the whole community, not just schools.
- Infection is common during school holidays as well as during term time. Parents start to worry more about lice when children go back to school because they think the lice are being caught there.
- A lot of infections are caught from close family and friends of all ages in the home and community, not from the school.
- It is often said that head lice prefer clean, short hair. In fact, they don't much care whether hair is dirty or clean, short or long. Short hair may make it easier for them to get from one head to another.

#### How you get them

- Head lice can walk from one head to another when the heads are touching for some time.
- You are very unlikely to pick up head lice from brief contact with other people. The longer you have head to head contact with someone who has lice, the more likely it is you will get them too.
- They can't swim, fly, hop or jump. The idea that they can jump may have come from the fact that, when dry hair is combed, a head louse caught on the teeth of the comb is sometimes flicked off by static electricity (this is one reason why detection combing should be done with the hair damp).
- You don't get them from objects such as the chair back. Although it's just possible that a louse might get from one head to another if a hat is shared, this is very unlikely. It's not the way infection is usually caught.

## What happens next?

- If you catch one or two lice, they may breed and increase slowly in number. At this stage, most people don't have any symptoms and won't know they have lice unless they look very carefully for them.
- For the first two or three months, there is usually no itch, but then the scalp may start to itch badly. This is due to an allergy, *not* to the louse bites themselves.
- Most people only realise they have head lice when this itch starts. By then they've had lice on their head for two or three months without knowing it.
- In most infections, there aren't more than a dozen or so lice on the scalp at any one time.
- Some people never get the itch, including adults. They may have a few lice on their heads for years without knowing it and can pass them to other people.
- Louse droppings may fall on to the pillow during the night. Pillows may then get dirty more quickly than usual.

## Prevention - Can you stop them?

- Combing is an important part of good personal care, but head lice are not easily damaged by it. Good hair care may help to spot lice early and so help to control them. There is no evidence that the old slogans "Break its legs, so it can't lay eggs" or "A legless louse is an eggless louse" have any truth in them.
- The best way to stop infection is for families to learn how to check their own heads. This way they can find any lice before they have a chance to breed. They can then treat them and stop them going round the family.
- The way to check heads is called "detection combing". It can be done as often as families want to.
- If a living, moving louse is found on one of the family's heads, the others should be checked carefully. Then any of them who have living lice should be treated at the same time.

## The problem won't go away

- People who think their children keep on getting head lice may have made the mistakes listed above and may keep on "treating" lice which have long since been cleared, or were never even there in the first place.
- If children do *really* keep on having living lice, this is most likely to be due to not doing the treatment properly and not treating all those close contacts who have also been found to have lice. Remember, if infection really does keep on happening, it is almost always from a member of the family, or a close friend. It is rarely from other children in the classroom except from a "best friend"
- If you *still* have problems, ask your family doctor, health visitor, local chemist, or School Health Advisor if a wet-combing method to remove the head lice might help.

## What the schools can do

- Schools must remember that most lice are caught in the family and the local community, not in the classroom.
- Mass head checks will not help, but the School Health Adviser can advise and support parents to check their own families.
- "Alert" letters should not be sent out. These can cause an "outbreak" of imaginary lice.
- Children who may have lice should not be excluded from school. If they do have lice, they will probably have been there for weeks already. Why not exclude? Exclusion is an illogical approach because:
  - It cannot eliminate the infection
  - It is an overreaction to a problem which is not a public health threat
  - It is not used for other conditions with low transmissibility such as verrucae and herpes simplex.
- The school should give information on lice for parents and staff including regular detection combing and how to do it. This should be on a regular basis, not just when there is thought to be an "outbreak" and should be done with the School Health Adviser.

## What families can do

- Make sure that all family members know about good hair care, including regular, thorough combing.
- The only way to control head lice which works is for the family to check their own heads.
- Check all the family's heads every now and then with a special plastic detection comb from the chemist's shop. *All* the family means *everyone* (adults as well as children) in the same household.
- **Only if you are sure you have found living, moving head lice in your family**, tell your relatives and close friends so that they can check their own heads. Treat any of your family you are sure have lice at the same time. Ask at the chemist's, the surgery, or the School Health Adviser which lotion you should use.
- Remember, never use the lotions unless you are sure you have found living, moving head lice (*not* nits).
- Try not to worry too much about head lice. They rarely do any harm other than causing an itchy scalp.