

HEALTH & SAFETY – HEAD LICE

POLICY

Head lice are a periodic problem in all childcare services, and can pose management problems for Educators and families. The aim of the policy is to enable swift and effective management of any outbreak, to minimise the spread of head lice between children, while respecting individual family's privacy.

The scheme has based this policy on Commonwealth guidelines laid out in "Staying Healthy in Childcare".

PROCEDURE

1. If an Educator suspects that a child has head lice, either by observing the presence of lice or nits on the child's hair, or by the child persistently scratching, s/he should call the parent to come and remove the child from care as soon as possible. Educators should not conduct close inspection of the child's head themselves unless the parent specifically requests that she do so. The child should be kept at a distance from other children until s/he is collected, to minimise the risk of cross-infestation.
2. The Educator should advise the parent to treat the child and other family members appropriately. This can be by application of an approved lotion or shampoo, or by using an approved specific herbal preparation. Manual removal by using a fine tooth comb in wet hair is possible, should other methods be inappropriate, but it is difficult to ensure that all lice and nits are removed. The child is to be excluded from care until the day after treatment has commenced, as the lice are killed within 6 hours of the application of insecticidal preparations (chemical or herbal). There may be dead eggs (nits) still present in the child's hair, but these pose no problem.
3. The Educator may not apply the treatment, unless she has specific written instruction from the parent (or agency responsible for the child's welfare). In this case treatment should be recorded on a medication record form. In general, it is preferred that the parent conduct the treatment.
4. Where head lice have been confirmed in a Family Day Care home, all parents should be informed, and advised to be vigilant. Reassurance that there is no stigma attached to head lice should be given, and sources of advice offered.
5. The incubation period for head lice is 7-10 days, so treatment may need to be repeated after this period.
6. It is only necessary to treat children if head lice are present in the child's hair: the treatments have no preventative effect. Vigilance and prompt action is the best control method to minimise the impact of outbreaks.
7. It is not necessary to treat furniture, bedding etc. Brushes, combs and hats can be washed in warm water and soap, or enclosed in a sealed bag for 48 hours.

Source: City of Ballarat FDC Handbook
National Law, Regulations and Standards (ACECQA 2011)
"Staying Healthy in Childcare, 3rd Edition, NHMRC
Advice from COB Environmental Health Department.

Reviewed September 2005, October 2008, July 2009, July 2012