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Mrs. L. Hardman, Headteacher

28th July 2017

Dear Parents

Head Lice

We are once again having reports of head lice throughout the school. I would be grateful if children's hair could be thoroughly checked every day. I have included some guidelines for your reference.

Thank you for your co-operation.

Yours sincerely

Mrs L. A. Hardman
Headteacher

What are head lice and nits?

- **Head lice** are tiny grey/brown insects. They are about the size of a sesame seed (the seeds on burger buns). Head lice cling to hairs, but stay close to the scalp which they feed off. They lay eggs which hatch after 7-10 days. It takes about 10 days for a newly hatched louse to grow to an adult and start to lay eggs.
- **Nits** are the empty white egg shells which are left when the lice hatch. Nits can look like dandruff, but stick strongly to hair. Unlike dandruff, you cannot easily brush out nits.

Who gets head lice?

Head lice are common in children, but can affect anyone at any age. They are not a sign of dirty hair or poor hygiene. Close 'hair to hair' contact is usually needed to pass lice on. Head lice cannot jump or fly, but walk from one head to another. They soon die when away from hair, and do not live in clothes, bedding, etc. Most head lice infections are caught from family or close friends who are not aware that they have head lice.

What are the problems with head lice?

Most people with head lice do not have any symptoms. An itchy scalp occurs in about 1 in 3 cases. This is due to an allergy to the lice, not due to them biting. It often takes about 3 months for the itch to develop after you are infected. So, you may not notice that you have head lice for a while, and you may have passed them on to others for some time. Head lice and nits do not wash off with normal shampoo. Head lice do not cause any other medical problems. In most cases the head is not 'crawling with lice'. Commonly, there are less than 12 lice present.

How can you tell if you have head lice?

Head lice are difficult to find just by looking in the hair. If you suspect head lice, it is best to do 'detection combing' (described below). Some people advise that you do this to children's hair regularly, about once a week.

- Wash the hair in the normal way with ordinary shampoo.
- Rinse out the shampoo and put on lots of ordinary conditioner.
- Comb the hair with a normal comb to get rid of tangles.
- When the hair is untangled switch to a detection comb. This is a special fine toothed comb that you can buy at pharmacies. (The teeth of normal combs are too far apart.)
- Slot the teeth of the detection comb into the hair at the roots so it is touching the scalp gently.
- Draw the detection comb through to the tips of the hair.
- Repeat this in all directions until you have combed all the hair.
- Check the comb for lice after each stroke. A magnifying glass may help.
- If you see any lice, clean the comb by wiping it on a tissue or rinse it before the next stroke.
- Comb over a white surface such as white paper. This is so that any head lice that are flicked out by the comb are easy to see.
- After the whole head has been combed, rinse out the conditioner.
- While the hair is still wet, use an ordinary comb to get rid of tangles.
- Repeat the detection combing in the rinsed hair to check for any lice that you might have missed the first time.
- It takes about 10-15 minutes to do detection combing properly, depending on how thick the hair is.

What are the treatment options for head lice?

Treatment is needed only if you see one or more live moving lice. Nits (empty eggshells) do not always mean infection. Nits stick to hair even when lice are gone (after treatment).

Wet combing treatment using the 'bug busting' method

'Bug busting' is a way of removing head lice without having to use a lotion or cream rinse to kill them. The Bug Busting method is described in the section above 'How can you tell if you have head lice?' Do this on every member of the household who has head lice. (The detector comb removes the lice which cannot grip hair which is slippery with conditioner). You need to do the wet combing routine every 4 days for at least 4 sessions (2 weeks).

- The first combing session should remove all hatched head lice, but does not remove eggs.
- Any young lice that hatch from eggs after the first session are removed at the second, third and fourth sessions. This is why it is important to do the full 4 sessions.
- If you see full-grown lice at the second, third, or fourth session, this means that some had been missed on the first session, or you have become re-infected from someone else. If this occurs, you should increase the number of sessions. In effect, following any session where you find adult head lice, you should do 3 further sessions at 4 day intervals where you do not see adult lice.

Do family and friends need treatment?

Only if they have lice. All people in the same home, and other close 'head to head' contacts of the previous 4-6 weeks should be contacted. Tell them to look for lice and treat if necessary. (It used to be advised to treat all close contacts even if they had no symptoms. This has changed to just treating people with definite head lice infection.) All people with head lice in the same home should be treated at the same time. This stops lice being passed around again.