

## ASSUMPTION CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL HEAD LICE POLICY

**Developed: 2004**

**Reviewed: 2008**

### INTRODUCTION

Assumption Catholic Primary School has developed the following Head Lice Policy in consultation with the parent association, teachers, the Community (School) Nurse and the Department of Health. The aim of this Policy is to ensure a consistent, co-ordinated and co-operative approach to managing head lice in the school community.

### ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

#### **The Parents' responsibilities are:**

- To learn about head lice infestation and management by reading the Department of Health's *Head Lice Fact Sheet*.
- To regularly check their child's hair for head lice infestation.
- To treat their child's hair immediately if the child has head lice, using the advice in the *Head Lice Fact Sheet*.
- To inform the school and other close contacts if their child has a head lice infestation, and to confirm that treatment of their child's hair has commenced.
- To be aware of and follow the school's head lice management policy.

#### **The Community (School) Nurse's role is:**

- To provide information, advice and education to parents and the school community about head lice management.
- To provide additional advice for families experiencing persistent head lice infestation.
- To provide additional education about head lice management to Head Lice Resource Parents as requested.

#### **The School's responsibility is:**

- To develop, implement and maintain a head lice management policy.
- To ensure that parents and staff are aware of the school's Head Lice Policy, and that parents are provided with a copy of the Department of Health's *Head Lice Fact Sheet* when their child is enrolled and on request.

#### **The Head Lice Resource Parent's role is:**

- To support and advise parents who have ongoing difficulty in managing their child's head lice infestation.

### HOW HEAD LICE INFORMATION IS DISSEMINATED

The school takes the following steps to ensure that accurate up-to-date head lice treatment advice is provided to the school community.

#### **The Department of Health's *Head Lice Fact Sheet*:**

- Is included in the student enrolment package.
- Is displayed in the school office waiting area, with extra copies available for parents.
- Is sent home to the parents on a regular basis and upon request.

- Is regularly promoted through appropriate channels.

#### **Other head lice education and management strategies:**

- **Head Lice Co-ordinator**
  - The school has nominated a Head Lice Co-ordinator, Administrative Officer, as the contact person for staff and parents for dealing with head lice issues. She is responsible for organizing dissemination of head lice information, arranging head lice education and management activities, and following up head lice *Letters to Parents*. Parents who require information, or who would like to become involved in supporting the school's Head Lice Management Programme, should contact the co-ordinator via the school office.
- **Head lice management information sessions**
  - Head lice information sessions are provided annually for staff and parents by the Community (School) Nurse or Head Lice Resource Parent, to ensure the school community is well informed.
- **Whole school or class-by-class 'Synchronised Weekend Head Lice Check'**
  - Synchronised weekend head lice checks at home by parents are promoted at least twice yearly, and more often if necessary. Information about this promotion is provided well in advance via the newsletter and a note home to parents. A short class head lice education session is also undertaken prior to the promotion weekend (the Head Lice Co-ordinator should negotiate this with the class teacher, Resource Parent or Community (School) Nurse).
- **Class Head Lice education**
  - Head lice information is included in class activities where appropriate, for example –
    - Personal development – how to identify head lice and comb them out.
    - Science – life cycle of the head louse.
    - Drama – short, humorous play.
- **Head Lice Resource Parent**
  - The school currently has one Head Lice Resource Parent, who is available to support parents
  - Head Lice Resource Parents are volunteers who have successfully dealt with the frustrations of treating head lice in their own children and who have attended the Department of Health's or Community (School) Nurse's head lice education sessions. Resource Parents are willing to be available to parents, via the school office, to provide problem-solving support for other parents who have carefully followed the Department of Health's *Head Lice Fact Sheet* advice, but who are having persistent difficulty removing the head lice. Resource Parents are also available to assist parents who may have difficulty reading or understanding the *Head Lice Fact Sheet*.
  - Resource Parents can arrange an interpreter service through the school, and may also be able to arrange assistance for parents experiencing genuine financial hardship.
  - Resource Parents **do not** undertake ongoing head lice treatment – that action remains the responsibility of the parents of a child with head lice.
  - Note: Parents who may be interested in becoming a Resource Parent should contact the Head Lice Co-ordinator for further information. (The co-ordinator should arrange Resource Parent education by booking the parent into a Department of Health head lice education session, or by arrangement with the Community (School) Nurse.

#### **WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A CHILD IS FOUND TO HAVE HEAD LICE?**

The school undertakes the following steps to ensure that a clearly defined process is followed when a child is found to have head lice:

**Day 1:**

- The student is given a brief, age-appropriate explanation about the head lice.
- A *Letter to Parents of a Child Found to have Head Lice* is sent home with the student. The letter informs the parents that their child has head lice and advises them that, as required by the School Education Act 1999, the child must commence head lice treatment before returning to school. A copy of the Department of Health's *Head Lice Fact Sheet* accompanies this letter.
- If available, translations of the *Head Lice Fact Sheet* are provided for non-English speaking parents. Alternately, where appropriate, parents are advised by telephone. Interpreter services such as a telephone interpreter service are used if required at the cost to the school.
- Parents of the other students in the class are sent an information letter on the same day, asking them to check their child's hair for head lice and advising them how to do this more effectively, using the Department of Health recommended hair conditioner method.

**Day 2:**

- Once treatment has commenced, the parents of the child with head lice should send the child back to school with completed *Confirmation of Treatment* tear-off section of the *Letter to Parents*. Parents are reminded that treatment must be completed over the 10-day period, as recommended by the Department of Health.
- If the *Confirmation of Treatment* slip, or similar note, is not returned and the student is not able to confirm that treatment has commenced, then the class teacher informs the Head Lice Co-ordinator or delegate. The co-ordinator contacts the parents to check that they have received the *Letter to Parents* and the *Head Lice Fact Sheet*. Students who have returned to school in this situation are sent home.
- If the *Letter to Parents* and the *Head Lice Fact Sheet* have been received but no treatment has started, then the parents are asked if they are experiencing any difficulty. Appropriate assistance is offered if parents are experiencing difficulty, e.g. serious financial hardship, or literacy or language difficulty.
- If the parents have no particular difficulty, then they are reminded of their responsibility to the child and to the school community. The parents are advised that the child must not return to school until treatment has begun. Parents must return a note to school with the child, or phone the Head Lice Co-ordinator, to confirm this.

**Day 3:**

- Where a student again returns to school without treatment having commenced, the Head Lice Co-ordinator or delegate may ask the Head Lice Resource Parent, or the Community (School) Nurse, who represents the Department of Health in the school, to undertake phone contact or arrange a home visit with the parent (the Co-ordinator should consult with the Community (School) Nurse or Resource Parent to arrange who is best able to do this). The purpose of this is to help identify any undisclosed difficulty, and to assist and advise the parents with the head lice treatment. The student is sent home.

**Day 4:**

- Where a student yet again returns to school without evidence of treatment, the Principal or delegate will contact the parents and advise that the student is immediately suspended from school, until treatment has commenced and the school

notified. The parents will again be offered assistance by the Resource Parent and the Community (School) Nurse.

#### **Day 5 – ongoing:**

- Where a student continues to be absent from school without due reason, the matter will be dealt with in accordance with the school’s Absenteeism Policy. Head lice infestation is easily treated and is not a disease. Where all parent support and information has been provided, and there is no remaining barrier to treatment, failure to treat is not a valid reason for absence from school.

**In the last resort only** - Where considered appropriate by the Principal and Community (School) Nurse, the family may be referred to the Department of Community Development, e.g. where a child is experiencing ongoing psychological distress, or if infected sores result from untreated head lice infestation and the sores remain untreated. Informing parents of this decision prior to referral is at the discretion of the Principal.

### **ADDITIONAL POINTS**

#### **Hairstyles:**

- Students with long hair must wear it tied back, braided and/or pinned.

#### **Recommended treatments:**

- The school advises parents to read the Department of Health’s *Head Lice Fact Sheet*, available free from the school office. The 10-Day Hair Conditioner Treatment is the Department’s preferred treatment. However, parents who wish to use insecticide treatment should do so according to the Department’s instructions in the *Head Lice Fact Sheet*, as labeling on some head lice products may be unclear or even inaccurate.

#### **Checking hair for head lice:**

- **Class or whole school ‘head checks’**
  - School staff, Head Lice Resource Parents and the Community (School) Nurse **do not routinely** undertake class head checks for head lice, as this is not an efficient or effective strategy for head lice control. Head lice can move at up to 30 cm per minute. They move rapidly away from searching hands and so an infestation can easily be missed. Most children do not have head lice, so valuable class time is wasted checking such children unnecessarily. In addition, it is the responsibility of individual parents to check their own child’s hair for head lice. Screening for head lice is most effectively undertaken by parents combing their child’s hair using hair conditioner to slow down the head lice, together with a metal ‘nit’ comb, as described in the Department of Health’s *Head Lice Fact Sheet*.
- **Checking a student who is believed to have head lice**
  - In the case of an individual student, the school Principal has nominated school staff members who may examine a student’s hair where there is reason to believe a student may have head lice, i.e. where eggs (nits) or crawling head lice have been sighted or where a child is scratching the head excessively. The *School Education Act 1999* authorises the school principal or a delegate to do this.
  - To ensure competency, the nominated staff members have received education in identifying active head lice infestation from the Department of Health or the Community (School) Nurse.
  - Staff are aware that a ‘dry’ head check may be unreliable. If, on inspection, no signs of infestation are seen, the parent is nevertheless informed and is asked to

check using hair conditioner. A *Letter to Parents* is sent home to inform parents.

**Suspension of a student from school:**

- Under the *School Education Act 1999*, students found to have head lice may be suspended from school at the discretion of the Principal or delegate until treatment has begun and all live head lice are being removed, in accordance with the Department of Health treatment advice. In practice, this means students can return to school the morning after treatment has commenced, **provided that** effective treatment is completed consistently over the following 10 days. A few remaining eggs are not a reason for exclusion.

For further information about head lice, go to [www.health.wa.gov.au/headlice](http://www.health.wa.gov.au/headlice)