

Head Lice in Primary Schools Kit

Guidelines for the School Management of Head Lice



A Health
Promoting Schools
approach to
managing head lice

Guidelines

Guidelines for the school management of head lice

The *Guidelines for the school management of head lice* outline both proactive and reactive strategies for managing head lice in the school community. They clearly outline the role of the school principal, the head lice support volunteer, and other staff in managing head lice within a school community. The *Guidelines* are based on the Health Promoting Schools approach and therefore include:

- curriculum materials;
- strategies for building a supportive environment and ethos; and
- links with the wider school community and local services.

The objective of the Guidelines is to assist schools to develop a sustainable infrastructure to support the school community with managing head lice.

It is the responsibility of families to detect and treat head lice, however the school has an important role in supporting families in this process. Families need the help of their school community to manage head lice effectively.

The recommended strategies in the **Head Lice in Primary Schools Kit** have the flexibility to be adapted. The extent to which an individual school implements or combines the strategies will depend on local circumstances. A commitment to the proactive strategies will minimise heavy or recurrent head lice conditions. The reactive strategies provide a comprehensive approach to managing outbreaks of head lice.

The role of the school principal

The school principal has an important role in the management of head lice within the school community. It is recommended that the principal read the *Learning to support the school community to manage head lice: a self-paced guide*, to

understand the most up to date information on head lice. It is important that the school principal works closely with **the teaching staff, administration officer and the head lice support volunteer**.

- All teaching staff need to be familiar with the *Learning and teaching* modules for primary schools and understand the procedures that will be put into place within the school to manage head lice. Teaching staff can support the process of managing head lice and it is recommended that the principal introduces the *Kit* at a staff meeting.
- The administration officer will have a significant support role, often fielding enquiries about head lice and including information in the school newsletter on a regular basis.
- The head lice support volunteer will play a large role in the management of head lice and should be strongly supported by the principal to ensure success and sustainability.

The **Head Lice in Primary Schools Kit** provides a variety of strategies that can be adopted by school communities to manage head lice. Those schools involved in the pilot project who implemented proactive strategies reported greater 'control' over managing head lice than those who used only a reactive approach. It is important that all strategies are supported by the school principal who is in the position to:

- encourage a proactive approach by families to detect head lice and treat quickly to reduce outbreaks;
- ensure the school has procedures in place for managing outbreaks of head lice;
- support the head lice support volunteer in dealing with difficult situations;
- encourage the use of the *Learning and teaching modules for primary schools* by teaching staff; and
- organise a support structure for the head lice support volunteer and other staff.

The role of the teaching staff

Teaching staff have an important role to play in the management of head lice within the school. *Teaching and learning modules for primary schools* are included in the **Head Lice in Primary Schools Kit** for use with years pre-school to seven. Teachers also have a role in alerting the principal when they suspect that a child has head lice. Teachers should minimise head-to-head contact between children when head lice are present.

The role of the administration officer

The administration officer plays a very important role in managing head lice in the school community. They will often be the first point of contact for head lice enquiries, and will need to deal with these situations sensitively. They will also need to be aware of how to direct these enquiries, either to the school principal or the head lice support volunteer. The administration officer, with direction from the principal, will also include head lice announcements, copies of the notification form and personal record in the school newsletter on a regular basis. A further role may be to coordinate the dissemination of *alert notices* to families when an outbreak occurs within the school. The administration officer will work closely with the school principal and the support volunteer to coordinate the management of head lice issues within the school.

The role of the head lice support volunteer

The volunteer is a key point of contact for families. The main role of the support volunteer is to provide information and support about head lice detection and treatment to families within the school community. The support volunteer could also facilitate sessions with small groups of parents that may be having difficulty understanding the information provided by the school in the *Managing head lice at home package* for families. The role of the volunteer may also be extended to include a general advocacy and/or advisory role within the school's overall approach to head lice. The extent to which the role develops will depend on the circumstances of the individual volunteer and the school. A whole of school approach remains the responsibility of the school principal.

The head lice support volunteer must have the support of the school principal and other staff to be effective. Other key support people for the volunteer

may include the Parents and Citizen's Association, the local community participation officer, the parent liaison officer, other liaison officers, the school health nurse and the local pharmacist. Clear role definition, expectations and boundaries enable the volunteer to act competently and confidently. The role may be defined prior to recruiting the volunteer or it may be developmental through an ongoing collaborative approach.

It is essential that the support volunteer uses the Learning to support the school community to manage head lice: a self-paced guide, included in this Kit to skill themselves to perform the role. It includes significant detail about:

- the role of the head lice support volunteer;
- general facts about head lice;
- detecting head lice;
- treating head lice; and
- examples of interesting situations.

To ensure that the head lice support volunteer can work effectively within the school it is important that this person has access to a desk and telephone, keeping in mind that head lice are a sensitive issue and confidentiality should be maintained where possible. It is also important that the support volunteer has easy access to the **Head Lice in Primary Schools Kit**, and that this can be safely stored within the school. The head lice support volunteer may also need to access a photocopier and fax machine on occasions.

The head lice support volunteer scheme was identified as the major success factor in the pilot project. Principal support for the support volunteer position was identified as essential for the effectiveness and sustainability of the role. The role of the support volunteer has been outlined above and is also discussed in the *Learning to support the school community to manage head lice: a self-paced guide*.

Identifying /recruiting volunteers

A head lice support volunteer may be any interested adult authorised by the school principal. This is usually a parent or school staff member. It is strongly recommended that the school consider recruiting two head lice support volunteers to ensure long term sustainability of this position, and for peer support.

The position should be recruited by the principal in collaboration with the Parents and Citizen's Association. Some suggested selection criteria for recruiting these volunteers include:

- The ability to work cooperatively with others including school staff, the Parents and Citizen's Association, other parents and school health nurses.
- The ability to relate well to diverse groups and demonstrate respect and sensitivity to the needs, values and cultures of others.
- The ability to give adequate time, energy and enthusiasm to the role.
- A willingness to carefully work through the *Learning to support the school community to manage head lice: a self-paced guide*.
- The ability to communicate well with the principal.

Talk to Your Local Pharmacy

It is recommended that the school principal or the head lice support volunteer approach the local pharmacy to discuss the possibility of the school purchasing a bulk amount of head lice products such as treatments, hair conditioner and/or head lice combs. The school may then wish to sell these products at a reduced cost to families in financial hardship to assist in the process of effectively managing head lice.



The Guidelines for the Management of Head Lice consist of:

- Proactive Strategies
- Reactive Strategies – Level 1
- Reactive Strategies – Level 2
- Supporting Resources:
 1. Managing head lice at home package
 2. School newsletter announcements
 3. Letters to families
 4. Learning and teaching modules for primary schools
 5. Presentation Materials

Proactive Strategies

The school takes a positive and whole of school approach by having a number of strategies in place including:

- The school provides each family with a *Managing head lice at home* package at the time of enrolment.
- The school nominates and supports at least one head lice support volunteer.
- The school newsletter regularly includes announcements which remind families to check weekly for head lice, treat effectively and notify the school.
- School curriculum materials are used by class teachers throughout the year.
- Interactive information sessions using the *Presentation materials* in the *Kit* are organised for school community members by the principal, Parents and Citizen's Association and/or the head lice support volunteer .

Heavy or recurrent head lice conditions should not occur if the above strategies are implemented. However, it is quite likely that mild conditions will continue to occur. The school may choose to manage this situation by ensuring all of the above strategies are implemented without necessarily moving to the reactive strategies described in the following section.



Reactive Strategies

Level one

The principal is advised of the presence or suspicion of head lice.

- An *alert notice and action taken at home slip* is sent home with all children in the classroom(s) concerned or the whole school.
- Teachers arrange class activities to minimise head-to-head contact between students, and encourage the same in the playground.
- Teachers use the *Learning and teaching modules* at this time when the issue is topical, if not already doing so.
- Adults in the school are advised to check themselves for head lice .
- Families are reminded to refer to the *Managing head lice at home package* (send out to families if the school has not already done so -
- The school head lice support volunteer is available for families requiring further support.

The next day:

- Teachers monitor the return of the *action taken at home slip* and forward them to the principal.
- Follow up is provided by the principal and/or volunteer with possible strategies including:
 - sending a *reminder letter* requesting the return of the *action taken at home slip*;
 - the school head lice support volunteer contacts families who request further information;

Level two

The principal is advised that some **action taken slips** are still outstanding.

The principal and/or school head lice support volunteer contacts individual families to assist in problem solving identified barriers. Potential strategies include:

Emotions and Beliefs

- Allow parent/carer to express emotions before expecting them to receive information.
- Discuss measures which reconcile the family's beliefs with those of others.

Communication (language, speech, sight, hearing)

- The school ensures the appropriate services are accessed, such as:
 - Translating and Interpreting Service* 131 450
 - Queensland Deaf Society (07) 3356 8255
 - Royal Blind Society of Queensland (07) 3397 1234

Detection and Treatment

- The school head lice support volunteer meets the family at an agreed place to provide further information and support.
- The school nurse meets the family at an agreed place and/or refers the family to a pharmacist or their family doctor.

Financial

- School principal or the head lice support volunteer negotiates with local community pharmacists re: bulk purchase of items for head lice management.
- The school or Parents and Citizen's Association may subsidise the items for head lice management.

If **action return slips** remain outstanding, the principal may consider follow up strategies which are consistent with Education Queensland policies and the school guidelines.

* Translating and interpreting costs will be paid by Education Queensland through the Equity Programs Unit, Education Services Directorate. Phone (07) 32370815 or (07) 32370811 for further information.