Winnipeg Regional Health Authority
Approach to Managing Head Lice

• Management of head lice, also known as pediculosis, in children is the responsibility of the parent.

• Public Health is a partner in head lice management through education, problem solving and resource development. Problem solving is unique for each community and Public Health is available to work in partnership with community members to investigate and propose solutions for complex issues.

• Head lice, like the common cold, are endemic and are found in every cultural and socio-economic group. In fact the prevalence of head lice in the world and particularly in North America has been on the increase since the 1970’s. We can’t change the fact that head lice exist but can respond to the challenges they pose in a positive, proactive way.

• Cases of head lice are not restricted to the school year or spread only in the classroom. There is good evidence of community transmission during holiday periods, among playmates and within families.

• Detection of head lice is best managed by the parents checking their children’ heads on a regular basis 12 months/ year. This is less stressful for the child and it has been our experience that a parent is very capable of detecting lice on their child’s head.

  “Conventional control methods rely heavily on the regular inspection of the heads of school children by school nurses, yet we know that no more than half the cases occur on children of school age. The other half occur on children below school age and on adults”¹

• Head lice management in schools should result in as little disruption as possible.

  “Because health care providers as well as lay personnel generally misdiagnose pediculiasis, and because few symptoms and no direct infectious processes are known to result, we suggest that the practice of excluding presumably infested children from school may be more burdensome than the infestations themselves.”²

• Nit free policy

  “The no-nit policies variously drafted and adopted by schools and other institutions aim to reduce the transmission of head lice by excluding infested children from school. Although meritorious in principle, such policies are often counterproductive when applied and appear not to affect prevalence”.³

  “’No nit’ school exclusion policies lack a rational medical basis and are not recommended”⁴

¹ MAUNDER, John. Head Lice: the beginning of the end. Medical Entomology Centre, University of Cambridge

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