**Head Lice Fact Sheet**

**The International School of Macao**

**WHRST (What, How, Symptoms, Risk Minimization, Treatment)**

**What**

Head lice are tiny parasitic insects that live among human hairs and they lay eggs, called nits, which stick to hair very close to the scalp. Lice look like small brown seeds that move very quickly and nits look like yellow/brown seeds residing close to the scalp. It is easier to find nits because they do not move. Head lice are not dangerous and they do not spread diseases however, their bites can cause itchiness and irritation in the scalp.

**How**

Head lice are very common among children in preschools and elementary schools. It is spread by personal contact (e.g. head-to-head) and by sharing belongings. Girls are more likely to get head lice than boys because they tend to have more head-to-head contact with others than do boys. Head lice move from person to person by crawling. They do not fly or jump but rather crawl on to things that come into contact with human hair – hats, hairbands, hairbrushes, scarves, and towels.

**Symptoms**

Although the most common symptom of head lice is itchiness, it is possible to have them without any symptoms. There are many signs and symptoms of head lice and they are:

* Itchy scalp (caused by Lice bites)
* Scratching
* Sores (developed by intense scratching)
* Crawling sensation on their hair or scalp
* Visible bugs (brown/beige/yellow “seed”-sized insects on hair, skin, or clothing)
* Finding lice eggs (nits) glued to the hair
* Swollen glands in the neck
* Red bumps on the head
* Pink eye

**Risk minimization.**

* Do not share personal belongings (hairbrushes, combs, hats, etc.)
* Launder clothes and sheets regularly
* Avoid head-to-head contact with others

**Treatment**

1. Combing Method – use a special fine-toothed comb (available in supermarkets and pharmacies in Macau, called “bay” in Cantonese)
* Wet the hair and apply a thin layer of conditioner to the hair
* Run the comb through the hair
* Check the residue for evidence of lice
* Repeat the combing over a period of days
1. Medicated Treatment – medicated shampoo can be picked up from local pharmacies in Macau. It is very important to carefully read and follow directions as these products are meant to get rid of head lice and their nits; not for use while taking a shower or bath.
* Pediculocidal shampoo/conditioner (Pediculicides = mediciines that kill lice)
* Olive oil treatments to smother any resistant lice from number 1 (if needed)
* House/school cleaning
* Metal nit comb use to remove dead lice and nits
* Manual removal of any firmly cemented nits/lice

**Additional Sources for Information:**

* <http://www.kidshealth.org/parent/infections/common/lice.html>
* <http://www.headlice.org>

**Reference:**

<https://www.aad.org/dermatology-a-to-z/diseases-and-treatments/e---h/head-lice>

<http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/head_lice>

<http://kidshealth.org/parent/infections/common/head_lice.html>