

HEAD LICE IN DENMARK

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In Denmark pediculosis among children, especially among girls, is a matter of concern. Serious rise in incidence of head lice is seen during the last decades. The use of insecticides for treatment of head lice has doubled during the last 4 years. Thus, little girls are at risk of being exposed to repeated insecticidal treatments of dubious efficacy.

31. January 2002 the first nation wide Danish Delousing Campaign was run. The initiative and the coordination of the action was taken by the organisation The Free Birds in frustration of the limited interest the head lice problems matter to the formal authority, The Ministry of Health. The aim was to get the attention of parents to take action themselves against head lice, and to join the community participation campaign: Each and every family should take responsibility by checking and removing head lice in their own family the particular day. The recommendation for check of head lice was wet combing with conditioner, WCWC, the Bug Buster principle launched by Community Hygiene Concern and evolved by Joanna Ibarra, UK. The purpose was, in combination with the campaign, to spread information about head lice, their way of living and of a proper check and control method, Bug Busting.

The information about the delousing and the head lice biology was planned to be spread through articles in journals of the health care personal and in journals for the staff of the day-care centres and schools. Also, an important spread of information was planned directly to the families through spots on TV, radio and in newspapers. Spread through electronic media was also planned. The distribution of information succeeded very well due to the straightforward message and due to the fact, that many people in Denmark] are tired of the time consuming little creature. Local as well as national radio- and TV-programmes announced the campaign message. Also, daily and weekly newspapers, local as well as national, brought the message, often illustrated with eye-catching cartoons or photos of headlice. The use of electronic spreading of information revealed a promising and easy way to get in touch with groups of key employees and in various care-taking organisations. Links to information were offered from a lot of web sites. Thus, the message was spread quite broad; one could hardly have expected more awareness. According to this, I expected that such a community participation campaign should reduce the incidence of head lice.

However, it is difficult to evaluate the outcome of such an initiative, when no specific evaluation was planned and no sampling before the campaign was carried out. However, the campaign is expected to reduce the insecticidal use. This can be demonstrated during the months to come. At least the focus on head lice has presumably brought awareness of the matter of concern. Fortunately an opportunity arrived to evaluate the frequency of participation among families in the Copenhagen area. 21. February 2002 a total of 277 pupils at a school in Copenhagen (5-8 years old, grade 0-3) were checked for head lice by combing in dry hair. Among these 3.6% had live head lice. The pupils were asked, whether they were checked at home on the delousing day, 31 January 2002, and whether they were checked before the announced check at the school on account of a letter from the school nurse. It turned out that 49% were checked on 31.January and 44% of the pupils were checked at home before the check at school.