

Guidance notes for Parents & Guardians

The Head Lice issue consists of two problems. The infection itself – which is a problem but not as serious as is often made out to be and usually easily dealt with. The bigger problem is the many myths and preconceptions associated with head lice. HEAD LICE – A GUIDE FOR SCHOOLS explodes the myths and provides new, clear advice on correct detection, diagnosis and treatment.

HEAD LICE – THE FACTS

The Lice

- Head lice are small insects with six legs. They are often not much bigger than a pin head, and rarely larger than a sesame seed (the seeds on burger buns).
- Head lice live on or very close to the scalp – they do not wander far down the hair shafts for very long.
- They only live in human beings; you can't catch them from animals.
- Nits are not the same things as lice. They are egg cases laid by lice, stuck on to hair shafts. If you have nits it doesn't always mean you have Head lice. When you get rid of all the lice the nits can stay stuck to the hair until it grows out.
- At any one time, most schools will have a few children with Head lice. The level of infection remains constant during the school holidays.

How do you catch head lice?

- Head lice can walk from one head to another when heads are touching for some time. They are only transmitted in this way and cannot swim, fly hop or jump. They are not caught from objects such as the back of chairs.
- Many infections are caught from close family and friends – not the school. Transmission of lice within the classroom is relatively rare. When it does occur, it is usually from a 'best friend'.

Detection & Diagnosis

Correct diagnosis is essential. The only reliable method of diagnosing current, active infection is by detection combing.

A diagnosis of head louse infection cannot be made with a certainty (no matter how many nits are present, how many reported cases there are in a school, how bad the itch is, or however dirty the pillows are) unless a living moving louse is found.

Detection combing – how to do it

You will need: A plastic detection comb, Good Lighting, An ordinary comb

1. Wash the hair well, and then dry it with a towel. The hair should be damp, not dripping.
2. Make sure there is good day light. Day light is best.
3. Comb the hair with an ordinary comb.
4. Start with the teeth of the detection comb touching the skin of the scalp at the top of the head.
5. Draw the detection comb carefully towards the edge of the hair keeping the teeth of the comb in contact with the scalp for as long as possible.
6. Look carefully at the teeth of the comb in good light.
7. Repeat this several times from the top of the head to the edge of the hair in all directions, working around the head and looking at the detection comb after each action.
8. Do this for several minutes. It takes 10 to 15 minutes to do it properly for each head.
9. If there are head lice, you will find one or more lice on the teeth of the detection comb.
10. If you find something, but are not sure what it is, stick it to a piece of paper with clear sticky tape and show it to your school nurse or family doctor. There can be other things in the hair which are not lice.
11. Clean the detection comb carefully under a running tap. A nail brush helps to do this.
12. **Do not treat this unless you are sure you have found a living, moving louse. If you need help ask your local chemist, health visitor, school nurse or family doctor.**

Treatment.

Treatment should not be started unless you are sure you have found a living, moving louse. Lotions must NOT be used 'just in case'. It's never a good idea to use chemicals if they aren't really needed.

If you are sure you have found a living louse:

- Check the heads of all the people in your home by detection combing.
- Only treat those who have living moving louse.
- Treat them all at the same time with a head louse lotion (NOT a shampoo).
- Ask your local chemist, school nurse, health visitor or family doctor which lotion to use, and how long to leave it on.
- Put the lotion on to dry hair.
- Use the lotion in a well ventilated room or in the open air.
- Part the hair near the top of the head, put a few drops on to the scalp and rub it in. Part the hair a bit further down the scalp and do the same again. Do this over and over until the whole scalp is wet.
- You do not need to put the lotion down long hair any further than where you would put a ponytail band.
- Use enough lotion – at least on small bottle per head.
- Keep the lotion out of the eyes and off the face. One way is to hold a cloth over the face.
- Let the lotion dry on the hair. Some lotions can catch fire, so keep well away from flames, cigarettes, stoves and other sources of heat. Do not use a hair dryer.
- Treat all of the infected family members in the same way with the same lotion SEVEN DAYS LATER.
- Check all the heads (by detection combing) a day or two after the second treatment. If you still find living moving lice, ask your local chemist, health visitor, school nurse, or family doctor for advice.

Notes

Many of the lotions are available on prescription.

In recent years, mechanical removal of lice by wet combing with the use of conditioner has been suggested as a means of treatment and control. This has not been substantiated by any authoritative scientific work although there are anecdotal reports of both success & failure. Where a health advisor is sure that appropriate and thorough conventional treatment of a definitely diagnosed case has failed, mechanical removal might be tried for individual cases. Wet combing is, an important way of diagnosing current infection but its effectiveness in diagnosis must be clearly distinguished from claims that it also works as a treatment.

Products that claim to repel lice are not recommended. Even if they were effective in protecting an individual from infection, they do not deal with the control of lice in the population, and do not treat existing infections.