



HEAD LICE

Advice for Parents and Students on Diagnosing and removing Head lice

Dear Parent/Carer,

It has come to our attention that a small number of students in your child's year group may currently have Head lice. Please can we ask that you check your child's hair as a matter of urgency and take any necessary action as soon as possible to prevent the problem spreading in school.

Thank you for your understanding in this matter

General Information

Head lice generally affect most children at least once during their school career. The best way to approach head lice is through prevention and early detection. Parents who are diligent about checking their child's scalp minimize the chance that the infestation will spread to the rest of the family or the child's classroom. The belief that head lice are associated with poor hygiene is common but inaccurate. Lice are equally likely to be found in clean as in dirty hair. Head lice eggs, also commonly called 'nits', are yellowish-white and oval shaped. They are firmly attached to the scalp, and can be found anywhere in the hair, the nape of the neck, or around the ears. Once hatched, head lice are about a millimetre in length. They start life clear in colour but quickly turn brown or reddish. Lice can only pass from one person to another during direct head-to-head contact. This is because lice cannot jump, fly or hop, they can only transfer to another person by walking along strands of hair.

What are the symptoms?

Head lice hold onto the scalp with hook-like claws and require blood from a human host to survive. Lice can survive on a human scalp for at least thirty days. Each female louse lays 3-5 eggs a day; the eggs hatch within a week and the new lice begin laying their own eggs within another week. Bites from head lice can cause intense itching and irritation on the scalp, but these symptoms may not appear until at least two months after the lice move in. A rash at the nape of the neck may also develop. They are also highly contagious, spreading from head to head in a matter of minutes if they are left untreated.

Removing Head Lice

You can part the hair and look for nits but they will move quickly into hiding. The best way to search for them is to buy a specially designed comb (nit comb) from a chemist. This is a very fine toothed comb with a spacing of less than 0.3mm.

NHS direct recommends the 'wet combing' method. Wet combing or 'bug busting' is used to remove lice without using chemical treatments. This method can be helpful because head lice are growing increasingly resistant to the insecticides which are commonly used to remove them. The best procedure is as follow:

- ❖ Wash the hair as normal using an ordinary shampoo.
- ❖ Apply conditioner liberally to wet hair (this causes them to lose their grip on the hair).
- ❖ Comb the hair through with a normal comb/brush first.
- ❖ With a fine tooth 'nit comb', comb from the roots along the complete length of the hair. After each stroke check the comb for any eggs or lice and wipe it clean. Work methodically over the whole head for at least 30 minutes.



- ❖ Rinse the hair as normal
- ❖ Repeat every **THREE DAYS** for at least **TWO WEEKS**

Head lice tip

To help detection, get your child to lean over a sheet of light coloured paper or cloth as you comb the hair.
Both live lice and eggshells may drop onto the paper.

What other treatments for head lice are available?

Insecticide treatments are available in lotion, mousse and shampoo form. You can buy these over the counter at a chemist or get them on prescription.

There are also a number of herbal remedies such as Tea Tree oil and Neem Seed oil products.

If you have any concerns or questions, you should consult your GP before using any of these treatments.

Sources of Further Information

www.headlice.org

Kidshealth.org/parent/infections/common/lice.html

www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Head-lice/

www.cdc.gov/lice/head/parents.html