

# Head Lice in School



Dear Parent / Carer

We have had reports of Head Lice in school. You may find the information below helpful.

## What are they?

Lice are small wingless insects that can live on the human scalp and lays eggs there.

## What are the symptoms?

Head lice often cause a person's scalp to itch. Itching isn't caused by lice biting the scalp, but by an allergy to the lice. However, not everyone is allergic to head lice, so you or your child may not notice a head lice infestation. Even if someone with head lice is allergic to them, itching can take up to three months to develop. In some cases, a rash may appear on the back of the neck. This is caused by a reaction to lice droppings.

## How to spot Head lice

Head lice can be difficult to see, even when the head is closely inspected. Unhatched eggs or nits (empty eggshells) alone aren't enough to diagnose an active head lice infestation. This is because it can be difficult to distinguish between eggs and nits that are dead or alive. Nits also usually remain glued to hairs long after successful treatment. To confirm an active head lice infestation, a louse must be found through a reliable, accurate method, such as detection combing. **Detection combing is the best way of finding head lice.** It involves using a special fine-toothed head lice comb with a tooth spacing of 0.2-0.3mm to comb through the hair. The comb can trap even the smallest lice. It works better on wet hair but can also be used on dry hair.

## Are they infectious?

Yes. Head lice can't fly, jump or swim but they are spread by head-to-head contact, climbing from the hair of an infected person to the hair of someone else.

## Head lice and school

There's no need for children with head lice to be kept off school, but we need them to be treated so it does not spread head to head.

## Checking the rest of the family

If you discover head lice in your child's hair you should check the rest of the family and alert close friends. You should only treat hair after live head lice have been found. Don't treat "just in case." However, once confirmed, take immediate steps to treat head lice.

## How to treat Head lice

**The wet combing method** involves removing the head lice by systematically combing the hair using a special fine-toothed comb. The comb's teeth should be spaced 0.2-0.3mm apart. Lice can be crushed or trapped between the teeth of nit combs with a tooth spacing of less than 0.19mm and remain

**Using a lotion or spray** is an alternative method of treating head lice. However, to be effective they need to be used correctly. Your pharmacist will be able to recommend an over-the-counter lotion or spray and advise you about how to use it correctly. A lotion or spray should only be used if a living

unseen. You can buy a fine-toothed comb from your local pharmacy or you can order one online. Lotions or sprays don't need to be used for wet combing. However, to be effective, wet combing needs to be carried out regularly and thoroughly. The method you should use is described below.

- Wash the hair using ordinary shampoo and apply plenty of conditioner, before using a wide-toothed comb to straighten and untangle the hair.
- Once the comb moves freely through the hair without dragging, switch to the louse detection comb. Make sure the teeth of the comb slot into the hair at the roots, with the bevel-edge of the teeth lightly touching the scalp.
- Draw the comb down to the ends of the hair with every stroke, and check the comb for lice.
- Remove lice by wiping or rinsing the comb.
- Work methodically through the hair, section by section, so that the whole head is combed through.
- Rinse out conditioner and repeat the combing procedure.
- Repeat the procedure on days three, six, nine, 12 and 15, so that you clear young lice as they hatch, before they have time to reach maturity.

How long it will take to comb your child's hair will depend on the type of hair they have and its length. For example, short, straight hair can be quickly prepared and can be fine-toothed combed in a few minutes. Longer, curlier hair will take longer to comb.

(moving) head louse is found. Crème rinses and shampoos aren't thought to be effective and therefore aren't recommended.

Ensure you have enough lotion or spray to treat everyone in your family who's affected. Use enough to coat the scalp and the length of the hair during each application. Follow the instructions that come with the lotion or spray when applying it. Depending on the product you're using, the length of time it will need to be left on the head may vary from 10 minutes to eight hours. The normal advice is to treat the hair and repeat the treatment after seven days. Some products also supply a comb for removing dead lice and eggs. Some products may be capable of killing eggs as well as lice, although there's no certainty of this. Check for baby lice hatching from eggs three to five days after using a product and again 10-12 days afterwards.

At least two applications of lotion are needed to kill lice over the hatching period because the lotions don't always kill louse eggs.

If the lice appear unaffected by the product, or if the problem persists, seek advice from your school nurse, health visitor, pharmacist or GP.

#### **Cautions**

Always read the instructions on the pack or leaflet that comes with a head lice treatment, particularly in relation to the following groups:

- young babies (under six months old)
- pregnant women
- people with asthma or allergies

If you're still unsure, seek advice from a healthcare professional before using the product. It's recommended that pregnant women use either wet combing or 4% dimeticone lotion, which is licensed for use during pregnancy and breastfeeding.

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