

Head Lice

Description: Head lice are tiny insects that live in hair. Nits are the empty egg cases attached to the hair that live head lice will have hatched from.



How to spot head lice:

- They are small whitish or grey-brown insects that range from the size of a pinhead to the size of a sesame seed.
- The lice will be more noticeable when the hair is combed with a special fine toothcomb – this is called detection combing.
- You may experience an itchy scalp
- Small white eggs or nits (egg cases) maybe spotted in the hair behind the ears.
- A rash on the back of the neck
- The feeling of something moving in the hair.

How is it spread?

- Head lice are spread from direct head-to-head contact. They will climb from one person's hair to another's.
- Head lice – cannot fly, jump or swim.
- Lice will live in long / short / clean or dirty hair.
- Only affects people – not transferable to or from animals.

How long is it infectious?

The lice will transfer from head to head while there are live insects on the head.

How long should my child stay home from school?

Your child does not require time off school, but the school should be informed and a course of treatment should be started as soon as possible.

Extra Note: On the following page you will find guidelines of the management of head lice.

Guidelines on management of HEAD LICE

for parents/guardians of school children

Infection with head lice occurs quite commonly among school children. Older children and adults can also be affected. While many people may react to this with feelings of disgust, head lice are harmless and are passed from person to person irrespective of standards of hygiene and cleanliness. Many parents naturally wish for an immediate and guaranteed cure to the problem. The truth is that none exists. Insecticide lotions are losing their effectiveness as lice gain resistance, and none can be guaranteed cure to the problem.

Many parents are reluctant to apply chemicals to their children's heads because of worries over toxicity. The Wet Combing method is gaining in popularity as a chemical-free treatment. It is clear that considerable thoroughness and time over an extended period is required to effect a cure.

Recommended Treatment

First Line: Try to remove the head lice by repeated combing of wet hair using a head lice detector comb, with conditioner applied to ease combing. Combs are available from pharmacies. Plastic head louse combs should be used but checked regularly to ensure the teeth are straight and intact.

Second Line: If this fails or is felt to be impracticable then an insecticide lotion can be used. Suleo M is the lotion of choice. Only in cases of severe asthma or skin problems affecting the scalp should Derbac M or Quellada M be used. Following treatment with an insecticide lotion, it is recommended that hair is combed using a plastic head louse detector comb on alternate days to clear any newly hatched lice.

Third Line: Carylderm lotion may be prescribed if the above treatment has failed. This must be confirmed by a health professional because of concerns about the potential toxicity of this preparation.

In summary, it is recommended that parents/guardians:

- Check their child's hair weekly with a plastic head louse detector comb
- Inform contacts of infected family members including school, nursery and playgroup
- Contacts need to be informed if they have had head to head contact for a minute or more in the last month
- Ensure that the appropriate treatment has been carried out; check the whole family with a plastic head louse detector comb and treat only those with live lice present.