

# Dealing with Head lice

## 1. Introduction

Head lice are insects that live in the hair and on the scalp of humans, they cannot jump and do not have wings so cannot fly. They are obligate parasites, which means that they cannot survive without us, feeding only on human blood, which they take from the blood vessels in the scalp.

Head lice have been around for as long as humans, moving from head to head to reproduce and feed. Head lice do not have a preference for the heads that they live on and will move easily from one to another by simply walking across when two heads are touching.

As many as 3 million people a year in the UK catch head lice.

## 2. Guidance

We believe being open and honest about head lice is the best way of keeping the problem down. Sometimes parents are shocked and upset when head lice are discovered. We urge all parents/carers to be pro-active in preventing the spread of head lice and to respond quickly if head lice are discovered.

We do not expect pupils to be kept away from school if head lice are discovered. We do, however expect children to be treated immediately and before they come to school.

There are lots of products to treat head lice, and there are non-invasive procedures that can be followed, but whatever the treatment choice, these three steps should always be followed:

- (i) **Detection.** Check regularly to see if there is an infection. At least once a week and whenever the hair is washed
- (ii) **Treatment.** Use your treatment method of choice. Remember regular use of the same product can render that method ineffective. Whatever method you use you must use a fine-tooth comb to remove and destroy lice, eggs (unhatched lice) and nits (empty, hatched egg shells).
- (iii) **Check.** Always be sure to check that the treatment has been effective and keep up those regular checks in the future. Proprietary lotions indicate how and when treatment should be given. Following any infestation, check daily.

## Further Points

- We recognise that having head lice can be an upsetting experience for both children and parents. We also recognise that even when parents have acted promptly, re-infestation can occur.
- By being open and honest with children we can educate them to the problem of head lice and to ways of minimising the risk of infestation.
- Since head lice are passed on by contact between the hairs on two heads it is sensible to have hair tied back.
- If the scalp becomes itchy children should inform parents immediately so that the cause might be investigated.
- A course of treatment for head lice should be completed in line with the directions given.
- Regular combing and brushing of hair should be encouraged.
- School is not able to screen pupils for head lice. However, we work closely with local health related agencies to make sure that all information available to parents is accurate and up-to-date.

***The Notes below were added following a search of reputable sites on the internet. They are for reference and information only, and the school takes no responsibility for the success or failure of these methods. We suggest that families should do their own internet search, but more importantly we suggest that you seek advice from your local pharmacist, walk-in centre or GP.***

## **DETECTION COMBING – HOW TO DO IT**

You need:

- Plastic detection comb (from the pharmacist)
- Good lighting
- Ordinary comb

You can buy a plastic detection comb from the pharmacist. Only those with flat-faced, parallel-sided teeth less than 0.3mm apart are appropriate

- Wash the hair well and then dry it with a towel. The hair should be damp.
- Make sure there is good light.
- Comb the hair with an ordinary comb.
- Start with the teeth of the detection comb touching the skin of the scalp at the top of the head. Keeping in contact with the scalp as long as possible, draw the comb carefully towards the edge of the hair.
- Look carefully at the teeth of the comb in good light.
- Do this over and over again from the top of the head to the edge of the hair in all directions, working round the head.
- Do this for several minutes. It takes 10 to 15 minutes to do it properly for each head.
- If there are head lice, you will find one or more lice on the teeth of the comb.
- Head lice are little insects with moving legs. They are often not much bigger than a pin head, but may be as big as a sesame seed (the seeds on burger buns).
- Clean the comb under the tap. A nail brush helps to do this.

## **HOW TO TREAT HEAD LICE**

### **Method 1: Wet combing:**

- Wash hair using ordinary shampoo.
- Apply a conditioner to make combing easier (this also makes it harder for the louse to cling on).
- Lightly towel dry the hair.
- Using a comb designed for this purpose part hair into small sections and comb hair from the scalp to the end.
- Wipe the comb each time and check for live lice.
- Repeat until you are sure the whole head is combed.
- Thoroughly rinse the hair and comb.
- Comb every three days for at least two weeks until no more lice are found.

### **Method 2: Specialised lotion from your local pharmacist**

Don't treat unless you are sure you have found a living, moving louse. Never use head louse lotions on your family '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.
- Only treat those who have living, moving lice.
- Treat them all at the same time with a headlice *lotion* (not shampoo).
- Ask your local pharmacist, health visitor or family doctor which lotion to use and how long to leave it on.
- Always follow manufacturers' instructions when applying a lotion.

- 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 again until the whole scalp is wet.
- With long hair you don't need to apply lotion down any further than where you would put a ponytail band (except when applying Dimeticone which should fully cover hair).
- 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. Don't use a hair dryer.
- Repeat the treatment in seven days' time for all of those receiving the first treatment.
- Check all the heads a day or two after the second treatment. If you still find living, moving lice, ask your local pharmacist, health visitor, school nurse or family doctor for advice.

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September 2015

Next Review: September 2016