

What are Head Lice?

Head lice are tiny insect parasites that live on the human head and need human blood as food. They lay their eggs (nits) on the hair shaft close to the scalp, approx 1cm away. Nits that are further away are likely to be empty leftovers.

How are Head Lice spread?

They spread by direct contact, 'walking' from one head to another. They don't jump, fly or swim. They happen in the best circles and do not mean that you or your child are unclean or dirty. Head lice are a very common problem, especially in school children.

What are the signs of Head Lice?

The main symptom may be an itchy scalp, especially behind the ears and the neck area. Crawling head lice may be seen in the hair; adult lice are usually dark brown in colour and 2 - 3mm long but it's difficult to see them as they hide. Eggs are grey - white and about the size of a grain of salt and they stick on the hair which makes them easier to see. Some children might feel itching weeks later or not at all.

How do I look for Head Lice?

Carefully comb plenty of hair conditioner through dry hair then comb again with a fine tooth nit comb. Wipe the comb onto a white paper towel and examine the towel for head lice and eggs. Rinse the hair as normal.

What should I do if i find Head Lice?

Firstly, DON'T PANIC! Most times you can make the diagnosis and start treatment yourself. check all household members for head lice. Inform the school and other contacts, including relatives and friends so that they may be checked.

How do I treat Head Lice?

- Use of insecticides, available in lotion and shampoo form. The normal advice is to treat once and repeat the treatment after 7 days over a longer period. The treatments which follow the initial treatment are because any remaining eggs should have hatched. Check the hair daily, repeat treatments and do the 'bug busting'.
- Bug Busting - Wash the hair as normal, apply conditioner and comb all hair thoroughly with a nit comb. After each stroke, check the comb for lice and wipe it clean. Work systematically around the whole head of hair. Rinse the hair as normal. Repeat every 2 - 4 days for at least 2 weeks. The conditioner causes the louse to lose its grip on the slippery hair and also probably blocks the breathing apparatus.
- It's assumed that head lice survive even longer without food (blood) and may survive in bedding, car seats etc... for 2 - 3 days. It's recommended to change bedding, vacuum car seats, sofas and beds on a regular basis. Efficient methods are heat, such as hot washing, hair driers, ironing or cold like the freezer. Soft toys should be washed hot or put in the freezer for some days or you can put them into plastic bags for 2 weeks.



How can I prevent a Head Lice infestation?

- brush hair thoroughly and regularly
- inspect hair after each washing
- tie back long hair while in school

- do not share brushes, combs, hats or towels
- remind children to avoid head to head contact
- 'bug busting' every week

Are there any shampoos I could use for prevention?

There is no specific proof for their efficiency but some parents recommend the following products;

- tea tree oil shampoo and conditioner
- lavender products

Should I do the treatment as prevention?

It's **not** recommended to use head lice shampoo as a preventative measure. These products kill the head lice but don't prevent an infestation. Lice might build up a resistance. The scalp may also become irritated.

Does my child have to stay at home because of the Head Lice infestation?

After a thorough treatment, children can return to school. If there are some nits left, they will hatch after seven days so the shampoo treatment has to be repeated at that time. After hatching, the young lice are not able to leave the host for seven days. Only adult lice can change their host.