



St Martin's Garden Primary School

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HEAD LICE

Head lice are difficult to remove because of their size, re-infestation rate, life cycle and their ability to develop immunity to insecticides but they are a fact of school life and should be seen as a nuisance not a health problem.

Once an infestation is confirmed, the lice can be treated at home using either the wet combing method or medicated lotions (see below).

Neither method will protect against reinfection if head-to-head contact is made with someone with head lice at a later date.

Wet combing method

The wet combing ('bug busting') method involves physically removing lice using a special fine-toothed comb with a spacing of less than 0.3mm. Your pharmacist can advise you about which combs are suitable. **As a school we have purchased combs and will be sending them home as soon as they arrive.**

Wet combing does not use chemical treatments. This method can be helpful because head lice are growing increasingly resistant to the insecticides used to remove them.

However, success depends on adopting a painstaking approach of regular and thorough combing.

The best procedure to follow is described below.

- Wash the hair as normal using an ordinary shampoo.
- Apply conditioner liberally to wet hair (this causes the lice to lose their grip on the hair).
- Comb the hair through with a normal comb first, until the comb runs freely.
- Using a special fine-toothed comb, comb from the roots along the complete length of the hair.

- After each stroke, check the comb for 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.

You will need to repeat the session every three days for at least two weeks to clear the lice. If the person catches more lice, the half-weekly sessions must continue.

Medicated lotion or spray

Ask your pharmacist for an over-the-counter (OTC) insecticide lotion or spray. Only use these medicated treatments if you find a living (moving) head louse. Crème rinses and shampoos are not recommended as they are not thought to be effective. Apply the preparation according to the instructions. Remove the lice and eggs with a special fine-toothed comb. Take care when applying treatment because the preparations are usually toxic.

The normal advice is to treat once and repeat seven days later. Insecticide lotions normally need to be left on the hair for 8-12 hours, or overnight.

The lotion may be capable of killing eggs as well as lice, but there is no certainty of this. Check for baby lice hatching out from eggs three to five days after you use it, and again at 10-12 days after.

No treatment is 100% effective.

Shall I keep my child off school?

There is no need for children with head lice to stay off school. They will probably have had the infestation for several weeks, so keeping them away from school is unlikely to affect transmission

There is no need to wash or fumigate clothing or bedding that comes into contact with head lice. Head lice can only survive on humans and die in a day or two away from the human scalp. Lice that fall off are likely to be damaged or approaching death (their life span is about three weeks)

Advice from Sally Mitchell (School Nurse)

