

Parent Information Sheet - HEAD LICE

Unfortunately, we do have several children in our Nursery with headlice. Please read and follow the advice below to reduce the chances of your child catching head lice.

Head lice are tiny insects that live close to the scalp where they lay their eggs. Unhatched eggs are darker in colour and usually take 7-10 days to hatch. Hatched eggs (nits) appear white in colour and are harmless. You only have head lice if you can find a living, moving louse (not a nit, the empty egg) on the scalp.

Can You Stop Them?

Combing is an important part of good personal care but head lice are not easily damaged by it. Good hair care may help spot lice early and so help to control them. There is no evidence that the old slogans “break its legs so it can’t lay eggs” or “a legless louse is an eggless louse” have any truth in them.

The best way to stop infection is for families to learn how to check their own heads. This way, they can find any lice before they have a chance to breed. They can then treat them and stop them going round the family. Where live lice are found, checking and removing (with a comb) twice a day stops them before breeding/hatching/spreading.

The way to check heads is called “detection combing” and can be done as often as families want to. If a living moving louse is found on one of the family’s heads the others should be checked carefully. Any of them who have living lice should be treated at the same time.

Detection Combing – How To Do It

You will need: a plastic detection comb (from the pharmacist), good lighting and an ordinary comb. Wash the hair well and then dry with a towel. The hair should be damp. (Some detection combs recommend the use of conditioner on the damp hair) Make sure there is good light, daylight is best. 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. Draw the comb carefully towards the edge of the hair, keeping contact with the scalp as long as possible. Look carefully at the teeth of the comb in good light, repeat this from the top of the head to the edge of the hair in all directions; working round the head, it will take 10-15 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. Clean the comb under the tap, a nail brush helps to do this. If you find something and aren’t sure what it is, stick it on a piece of paper with clear sticky tape and show it to your School Nurse, Pharmacist or GP. There can be other things in the hair that are not lice. Detection combing should be carried out once a week.

How To Treat

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 is 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 head lice lotion (not shampoo). Ask your local pharmacist, school nurse, health visitor or family doctor which lotion to use and how long to leave it on. Always follow manufacturer’s instructions when applying a lotion.

There is no published evidence that alternative remedies such as tea tree oil, essential oils and other herbal remedies are effective in the treatment of head lice. Try not to worry too much about head lice. They are unpleasant but they rarely do any harm other than causing an itchy scalp. If you need further help and advice, ask your local Pharmacist, School Nurse, Health Visitor or Family Doctor.