

Pediculosis (Lice) Information for Parents

There is an increased prevalence of head lice during the fall and winter months due to sharing hats and scarves. Although an annoying problem, head lice should not cause students to miss instruction time, or cause panic and alarm.

Lice are wingless insects that hold on to the hair, feeding from the blood in the scalp. They spread through head-to-head contact but contrary to common belief, **they do not jump**. Adult females live for up to a month and lay around five eggs a day. Their empty eggs are called nits. **Lice cannot live off of a human host for more than 24hrs**, and their ability to travel significantly decreases after 4-6 hrs.

Lice spreads when heads come in contact so sleepovers, after-school activities, playing with friends and visiting family are also common places for children, and adults, to pick them up and pass them on. Head lice are seen as an established part of school life – as children spend so much time playing and learning together, it's most commonly spread amongst children between the ages of 6 and 11 years of age.

7 Key Head Lice Facts:

- Head lice are common among young children and their families
- Head lice don't spread disease
- Head lice can be spread from adults to children and back again
- There's nothing to be embarrassed or ashamed about having head lice
- Having head lice has nothing to do with good or bad personal hygiene
- Lice eggs hatch after around 7 days so *two applications are **always** needed* to make sure all lice have been killed
- There are pesticide, non-pesticide, combing and alternative treatments on the market.
Your pharmacist will be able to help you work out which is best for you and your family

Who is responsible for the prevention of head lice?

It remains parental responsibility to detect and administer treatment for head lice to their own children. From time to time you will receive 'Once a week, take a peek' messages from our health office to remind you of our campaign to 'take a peek!' in your child's hair.

○ Do weekly head checks and look for lice and nits. (Try checking on Friday evening so you have the weekend to treat if necessary.) Lice and nits are very small; use a bright light and/or magnifying glass.

- Don't share personal items that have been close to the head or neck.
- Keep long hair in a braid or ponytail

Note: It's important to check your child's hair, as head lice *don't always cause an itchy scalp (head)* so many people will be unaware that they are infected. Itching or rash on the neck is most common in head lice infestation.

How Do I Look For Head Lice?

To diagnose a case of head lice you need to find them alive. They move fast and are small – so they can be hard to find! For best results, search the hair while wet, which makes it harder for the lice to move across the hair shaft. Look for light grey, light-brown, or even black insects. Lice can be as large as a sesame seed!

Where to Peek:

- Close to the scalp
- Behind the ears
- The back of the neck
- The top of the head

What to Peek for:

- Adult lice are 2-4 mm long. Immature lice are even smaller, and are light brown, grey or black in color.
- Small bites or areas of redness, scabs, or irritation on the nape of the neck or scalp
- Live lice remain close to the scalp, because they require warmth to survive
- Nits are unhatched, dead, or empty egg shells. Simply remove these by comb/hand.

Checking for lice might not be your idea of fun but it's really no big deal and shouldn't be a stressful experience for you or your child. It is just a normal part of every family's personal hygiene routine, like brushing your teeth or washing your hair. A good time to do your routine lice checks would be while watching the TV or at bath-time. You could make this experience even more stress-free by:

- Showing your child how to check their own hair
- Using the weekly peek as an opportunity to tell a story or ask about their day
- Asking them to check your hair for you
- Rewarding your child for each week's successful search
- Turning it into a fun game of hide and seek
- Putting their favorite TV program as a distraction

Good lighting is important, and so is comfort! Comb for lice, parting hair in small sections and returning from time to time to areas you've already covered just to make sure.



What can I do as a parent to help control infestation?

As previously mentioned it is parental responsibility to detect and administer treatment for head lice to their own children. Timely Detection and **effective ongoing** treatment of head lice is necessary to reduce the instance of outbreaks.

What is the school doing to help control infection?

Although schools no longer have 'nit nurses' or do termly checks, we do still have an important role in supporting parents in managing the problem. By working closely with parents and our students and promoting the head lice policy we can hopefully make a difference. We will provide advice and support to parents by promoting our 'Once a week, take a peek' campaign, and additional support from the school nurse if requested by a parent. If your child is suspected of having head lice we will inform you and request that you check your child and treat if necessary.

Why do you not exclude children from school who have head lice?

In short, the American Academy of Pediatrics, Department of Public Health and the Centers for Disease Control all agree that students should not be excluded for head lice infestation. The reason for this is that, although head lice are unpleasant they are not classified as an infectious disease. Furthermore, extensive research shows that head lice is relatively difficult to pass from one person to another; requiring prolonged head to head contact for transmission, therefore making it difficult to transmit in a school setting.

Why does the school not send letters when there is an outbreak of head lice?

'Alert' letters frequently lead parents to attempt to treat their children preventatively, which is neither effective nor advised. Head lice infection cannot be prevented, and over-use of insecticide treatments may lead to resistance, or "super lice."

How Do I Get Rid of Head Lice?



Wet combing method:

The wet combing ('bug-busting') method is physically removing lice using a nit comb, without using 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 is as follows:

- 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. ○ Then, with a fine-toothed nit comb, comb from the roots along the complete length of the hair and after each stroke, check the comb for lice and wipe it clean. Work methodically over the entire head for at least 30 minutes.
- Rinse the hair as normal.
- Repeat every three days for at least two weeks.

Medicated lotion or rinse:

Permethrin lotion 1% (also known as **Nix**) is another **over the counter** product which also only kills lice, but not eggs, and will require repeat treatment in nine to 10 days. Malathion lotion 0.5% (also known as Ovide) is a **prescription** medication that is approved for head lice and can kill some eggs.

Apply the preparation according to the instructions, and remove the lice and eggs with a fine toothed nit comb. Take care when applying treatment, because the preparations are usually toxic.

The normal advice is to treat once, and repeat seven days later: Make sure you have enough lotion to treat all those affected in your family.

No treatment is 100% effective.

What If Head Lice Are Still There After Treatment?



If you still find live lice after you finish the treatment either it's failed or there has been a re-infestation. If the treatment fails you'll usually find lice of all stages but when experiencing a *re-infestation* you will find less lice *if discovered quickly*. You'll need to treat again so make sure that you:

- change the pesticide to a different type of treatment
- use a good quality comb if you're using the 'Bug Busting' method
- read the instructions carefully and follow them exactly
- use enough treatment to cover the whole head and full length of hair
- leave the treatment on for long enough
- complete the treatment course

Resistance:

If the lice appear to be unaffected by the product (some lice may have developed resistance to a particular insecticide) or if the problem persists, take advice from your school nurse, health visitor, pharmacist or GP.

Caution!!!

Always ask for advice before using medicated lotions on young babies (under six months), pregnant women or people with asthma or allergies, and always read the instructions carefully.