

Headlice

Further to our previous letter sent just before half term, please can we remind ALL FAMILIES of the following NHS guidance about headlice.

Head lice and nits are very common in young children and their families. They don't have anything to do with dirty hair and are picked up by head-to-head contact.

Head lice are small insects, up to 3mm long, and can be difficult to spot

Head lice eggs (nits) are brown or white (empty shells) and attached to the hair

Head lice can make your head feel itchy or like something is moving in your hair.

The only way to be sure someone has head lice is by finding live lice.

You can do this by combing their hair with a special fine-toothed comb (detection comb). You can buy these online or at pharmacies.

How to get rid of head lice

You can treat headlice without seeing a GP.

Treat head lice as soon as you spot them.

You should check everyone in the house and start treating anyone who has head lice on the same day.

There's no need to keep your child off school if they have head lice.

Wet combing

Lice and nits can be removed by wet combing. You should try this method first.

You can buy a special fine-toothed comb (detection comb) online or from pharmacies to remove head lice and nits.

There may be instructions on the pack, but usually you:

- wash hair with ordinary shampoo
- apply lots of conditioner (any conditioner will do)
- comb the whole head of hair, from the roots to the ends

It usually takes about 10 minutes to comb short hair, and 20 to 30 minutes for long, frizzy or curly hair.

Do wet combing on days 1, 5, 9 and 13 to catch any newly hatched head lice. Check again that everyone's hair is free of lice on day 17.

Medicated lotions and sprays

Ask your pharmacist for advice if you have tried wet combing for 17 days, but your child still has live head lice.

They may recommend using medicated lotions and sprays. These kill head lice in all types of hair, and you can buy them from pharmacies, supermarkets or online.

Head lice should die within a day. Some lotions and sprays come with a comb to remove dead lice and eggs.

Some treatments need to be repeated after a week to kill any newly hatched lice.

Check the pack to see if they're OK for you or your child and how to use them.

If lotions or sprays don't work, speak to your pharmacist about other treatments.

Some treatments aren't recommended because they're unlikely to work.

For example:

- products containing permethrin
 - head lice "repellents"
 - electric combs for head lice
 - tree and plant oil treatments, such as tea tree oil, eucalyptus oil and lavender oil
- herbal remedies

You can't prevent head lice

There's nothing you can do to prevent head lice.

You can help stop them spreading by wet or dry combing regularly to catch them early.

Do not use medicated lotions and sprays to prevent head lice. They can irritate the scalp.

There's no need for children to stay off school or to wash laundry on a hot wash.

Mistaken Advice

False	True
There is no need to check that a treatment has worked when using products which kill lice in two doses a week apart.	The product may kill the lice but not the eggs. A louse may be ready to leave the head in 6 days after hatching, so always check on day 5; some eggs may hatch between doses and some on days 9,10 and even 11, so check again on day 12.
After using a single dose product, relax, because that's the end of the infestation!	It is particularly difficult to kill louse eggs. Always check for baby lice on day 5 and again on day 12 after using a treatment.
People who spread lice are not bothering to treat their hair.	This is not always the case as many people are using products claimed to eradicate infestations completely, which, in fact, do not. They may spread lice unsuspectingly.
Fine tooth combing in dry hair is as good as wet combing to detect lice.	The most reliable way to check is to wet comb because soaking wet lice stay still. In dry hair lice move quickly away from disturbance.
Itching is the first sign of lice.	Itching may take weeks to develop after first catching lice. Some people never itch.
Ordinary combing damages/kills lice "break their legs and they won't lay eggs".	Head lice that are caught in combs and brushes are rarely damaged. If a louse is clinging to a stray hair in a brush or comb, it can be returned to the head unhurt at a subsequent stroke.
Disinfect clothing, cuddly toys and furnishings and don't share hats and scarves.	There is no need to do this as the only lice that wander or fall off the head are dying. On the other hand, stray hairs left in brushes and combs should be cleaned out.
Head lice can be seen at a glance.	Head lice are difficult to see as they usually stay close to the scalp and remain hidden.