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# HEAD LICE

## Information for families

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### About head lice

Head lice are small insects about the size of a sesame seed, when full grown. They live in the hair very close to the scalp.

Nits are *empty* egg cases which are glued to the hair strands and move away from the scalp as the hair grows.

You only have a head louse infection if you find a *live, moving louse* not nits. Nits, on their own, are a sign of a *past* infection.

Itching is an *allergic reaction* to louse bites and is a late sign of infection. The itching can take a while to go away after treatment.

Head lice *walk* or *clamber* from one head to another if heads are *close together* for some time. They do not jump or fly.

Anyone can catch head lice, young or old, whether their hair is short, long, dirty or clean.

Many infections are caught and passed on through *family* and *friends* in the home and community, not just in schools.

The best way to prevent head louse infection is for families to *check* their heads *regularly* (e.g. after each hair wash) using a detection comb and by following the advice in this leaflet.

**Please note** – It does not matter how many nits you find or whether you have an itchy scalp - unless you find a live louse you do not have a head louse infection.

## How to detect a head louse infection

This is best done on wet hair, as lice are more visible and cannot move on wet, conditioned hair.

You will need a plastic detection comb which can be obtained from the pharmacy (the teeth are spaced and angled to lift out lice).

1.	Wash and rinse hair as normal.
2.	Apply conditioner and massage in but do not rinse off.
3.	Remove tangles with a wide-toothed comb.
4.	Change to the <i>detection</i> comb and comb hair in sections from roots to ends starting at the forehead and combing towards the nape of the neck.
5.	Wipe the comb on kitchen paper after each stroke and examine for lice.
6.	Repeat until whole head has been covered.
7.	Rinse hair well.
8.	Dry hair as normal.
9.	If any lice are found then carry out <i>contact tracing</i> and treatment as described in this leaflet.

If you are unsure about what you have found, stick it to a piece of white paper with sellotape and show it to your pharmacist or GP.

[For 'Bug Busting', carry out stages 1 to 7 and then repeat stages 3 to 6 but then comb from nape of neck to forehead until no more lice are being combed out – see under 'How to treat' on the back page].

**Please note** – The best way to stop head louse infection is to do detection combing regularly. Do not use insecticide treatments to prevent infection.

## How to track down lice by contact tracing

You need to find out who the lice have come from or have gone to in order to prevent re-infection. These people may not know that they have lice.

Use the following checklist to make sure that you get in touch with everyone who has been in close head contact with the infected person. Each person on the list should check themselves on wet hair using a detection comb. If lice are found, they too should list and tell contacts and treat the infection described in this leaflet.

	Names	Contacted
Parents		
Grandparents		
Brothers/sisters		
Aunts/uncles		
Cousins		
Close friends		
Other householders		
School/nursery friends		
Babysitter		
Club members		
Dancing/sports friends		
Neighbours		
Others		

**Only treat if you have found a live, moving head louse.**



## How to treat head louse infections



You need to choose which method of treatment is *best* for you:-

A water-based (aqueous) insecticide called a *liquid* used for young children and those with eczema or asthma.

An alcohol-based insecticide called a *lotion* used for older children and adults.

The Bug Busting method, which is wet-combing using a detection comb with conditioner (as described under detection), *repeated twice weekly for two weeks*. Use this method if you wish to avoid using chemicals or the insecticide treatment has failed.

### Using Insecticide treatments

Ask at your surgery or pharmacy which lotion or liquid to use and obtain sufficient for two 50ml applications repeated seven days apart. Thick curly or long hair will need extra lotion.

Apply liquid or lotion to *dry* hair.

Parting hair and working over the whole head, sprinkle on and rub into the scalp until it is *wet*. There is no need to apply further down than where the pony tail band is placed.

Allow the hair to dry naturally and leave on for 12 hours or overnight.

*Repeat* this treatment *7 days later* to kill any lice which may have hatched from eggs which were not killed the first time.

Check head *2 days after* the second treatment. If you find *live* lice, ask at your surgery or pharmacy for advice.

**Please note** – If the problem will not go away – did you:

- Use enough lotion or liquid?
- Apply it correctly?
- Leave it on for 12 hours?
- Repeat the treatment 7 days later?
- Check all the close family and friends and treat at the same time?