



Prevention

Useful activities and ideas to help prevent infestation:

- Check your child's hair regularly for head lice and eggs (nits) – use a metal fine tooth 'nit' comb and plenty of hair conditioner applied to dry hair, to make the task easier.
- Tie long hair back – braid and/or put it up if possible.
- Consider applying hair gel or mousse – these do not prevent or repel lice but may help to keep stray hair strands from contact with other heads.
- Avoid sharing combs or brushes.
- Immerse brushes and combs in hot water for 10 minutes after use to kill any head lice or eggs trapped in them. Using an old tooth brush will also help remove any debris from the comb.
- Remind your child to avoid head-to-head contact with other children e.g. when working at the computer with others, or when playing, or hugging.

Repellents

There are no repellents that have been tested and proven to discourage head lice.

Further information

Contact your community (school) nurse for further assistance – or alternatively visit www.public.health.wa.gov.au

This document can be made available in alternative formats such as audio tape, computer disc or Braille on request.

Produced by Immunisation Program
© Department of Health 2010



Government of Western Australia
Department of Health

Head Lice



HP11187 FEB'10 245'16

What are head lice?

Head lice are tiny insect parasites that live on the human head, feeding on the scalp. They reproduce by laying their eggs (nits) on the hair shaft close to the scalp.

What do head lice look like?

Adult head lice are usually dark brown and about 2 to 3 mm long. Hatchlings (young lice) are often a lighter brown and about 1 to 2 mm long. Eggs (nits) may be seen attached to the hair shaft and are grey-white and about the size of a grain of salt.



How are head lice spread?

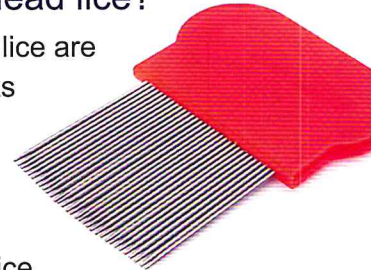
Head lice are spread by head-to-head contact with another person who has head lice. They are not spread through bed linen, clothing or head gear, as they do not leave the scalp unless they are dead or dying. Eggs (nits) do not fall off until weeks after they have hatched as the egg shells are glued tightly to the hair shaft.

What are the signs of head lice?

The most common sign is a persistent itch when the skin reacts to the saliva of the head lice. Itchiness can take weeks to develop. Those children who have had lice more than once, the skin may become desensitized and there may be little or no itch.

How do I look for head lice?

Unless numerous head lice are visible, 'dry' head checks are unreliable, due to the speed at which lice can move.



To check hair for head lice, carefully comb plenty of hair conditioner through the dry hair, then comb again in sections with a metal fine-tooth 'nit' comb. The hair conditioner slows the head lice down so that they can be trapped in the comb. Wipe the combings on a white paper towel and look for head lice.

To check the hair more effectively for eggs, use a magnifying glass in strong light, eg sunlight, to examine the hair close to the scalp, especially behind the ears and at the nape of the neck.

How do I clear the hair of head lice?

You have two options:

- Use an insecticide product purchased from the pharmacy. It is important to follow the directions. This is a quick treatment, but it is still important to go through the hair systematically to remove lice or nits.

- Use the hair conditioner method for cleaning the head of lice by thoroughly saturating dry hair with conditioner, followed by combing with a metal tooth comb through the hair to remove the trapped lice. This can be an effective method of clearing the lice but is more time consuming as it needs to be done daily.



Household cleaning

Not necessary, as eggs do not survive long away from the hair or scalp.

Neither is it necessary to wash all household linen or clothing.

Exclusion from school

Children are excluded from school until treatment has commenced.

All live lice removed from the hair (a few remaining eggs are not a reason to exclude).