

Headlice

Head Lice

What are head lice?

Head lice are tiny insects that live in hair and are a common problem, particularly for primary school children. Nits are the empty egg cases that head lice hatch from and can be found attached to hair when someone has head lice.

Don't worry, head lice are pretty harmless in terms of health but they can be irritating, and can live in hair for a long time if you don't treat them.

Remember that adults can get head lice too and head lice spread through head to head contact so if one person in the family has head lice, everyone should be checked.

If you find head lice in your child's hair, please their teacher or school nurse know so that we can make sure other children at school can be checked too. This helps us to stop head lice spreading and means there is less chance of catching head lice again.

How do you get head lice?

Head lice spread through direct head to head contact. They climb from one person's hair to another person's.

They can't fly, jump or swim and it's very unlikely that they will spread through objects like hats, combs or pillows.

If someone has head lice, it has nothing to do with how clean they are. Head lice don't have a preference. They can be found in clean, dirty, long or short hair. They only affect people and can't be caught from animals.

If a head louse is detached from hair, then it will usually die within 12 to 24 hours.

How do I spot head lice?

Head lice can be really difficult to spot, even when you inspect your child's head really closely. They are small white or grey-brown insects that can range from being the size of a pinhead to the size of a sesame seed.

The only way to be sure that someone has head lice is to find a live louse. The easiest way to do this is to comb the hair using a special fine-toothed comb. You can buy these at most high street health and beauty shops, supermarkets or pharmacists.

Make sure you check for head lice if:

You notice small white eggs (nits) in the hair behind the ears or at the back of the neck

Your child or you have an itchy scalp

You notice a rash at the back of the neck

Your child or you feel as though something is moving in the hair.

How do I get rid of head lice?

Even if you only find one head louse in your child's hair, you should still treat them for head lice.

Head lice are tough. They can't be killed by washing with regular shampoo or by combing or brushing your hair normally.

Lotions and sprays are a very effective way to kill head lice. They should only be used if a moving head louse is found.

Make sure you read the instructions and all information carefully if you are using a lotion or spray because some treatments aren't suitable for pregnant women, women who are breastfeeding or children under two.

You can also remove head lice with a specially designed comb. This is suitable for everyone and is inexpensive. It needs to be repeated several times and it can take a long time to do it thoroughly.

You can speak to someone at your local pharmacy for more information about treatments.

How do I keep head lice away?

It can be difficult to stop your child from getting head lice. The best way to spot head lice and catch them early, is to comb wet and conditioned hair once a week with a special fine toothed comb.

If your child has long hair, you should keep it tied up or plaited for school. This might help prevent them from getting head lice because it makes it more difficult for head lice to attach themselves to the bottom of strands of hair which is where they like to live.

