



HEADLICE

Lice hang on tight to the hair, usually close to the scalp where there is warmth, food and shelter from detection. Full grown lice take the opportunity to move from head to head during close contact. Younger lice tend to remain for about 6 days on the head where they have hatched.

Head lice need to maintain contact with a host in order to survive. Those lice that leave the host voluntarily, or fall off, are likely to be damaged or approaching death (their life span is about 3 weeks) and so unable to start a new colony. There is no need to wash or fumigate clothing or bedding that comes into contact with head lice.

If you are at all worried about head lice or feel you need more advice on how to cope, then you should consult your school nurse, health visitor, pharmacist or family doctor.

Detection

Head lice are well camouflaged and hide when disturbed by combing. They do not always cause itching, particularly when recently arrived on the head. They may also be few in number and a quick inspection is unlikely to detect them. The following method of detection is effective:

Wash the hair using ordinary shampoo, then use a wide toothed comb to straighten and untangle the hair. It is easier to do this with wet hair, and using hair conditioner.

Once the comb moves freely through the hair, without dragging, switch to a fine tooth comb. Make sure the teeth of the comb slot into the hair at the roots and draw down to the ends of the hair with every stroke. The comb must be fine enough to catch the lice - do not confuse lice or their eggs with clumps of dandruff or other debris.

Check the comb for lice after each stroke as you work through the hair section by section, so that the whole head of hair is combed through, then rinse out the conditioner and repeat the combing procedure in the wet hair.

This can be undertaken on a regular basis - eg at routine hair washing sessions - to detect the presence of lice before they can spread. Check all family members at the same time and arrange treatment when lice are found.

Treatments

If you find lice, then there are two options. Whichever option you choose it is important to recognise that neither will protect against re-infection if head-to-head contact is made with someone with head lice at a later date.

1. Lotions and crème rinses using insecticides

Do not use lotions and rinses unless you find a living, moving louse. Check all close family/friends by the "wet-combing" method and treat anyone who is found to have lice at the same time to prevent re-infection.

Ensure you have enough lotion/rinse to treat all those affected and follow the instructions on the packet carefully, eg as to

how long the treatment must remain on the hair to be effective, how often you may apply the product etc.

The product may be capable of killing eggs, as well as lice, but there is no certainty of this. Check for baby lice hatching out from eggs 3-5 days after you use it, and again at 10-12 days.

If lice appear to be unaffected by the product (some lice may have developed resistance to a particular insecticide) or if the problem persists - then you should take advice from your local school nurse, health visitor, pharmacist or GP, who will be able to advise you on alternative treatments and explain how to use these to best effect. You should seek advice where whoever is being treated is either under 1 year of age, suffers from asthma or allergies, or is pregnant or breast feeding.

2. Chemical-free treatment

Ingredients

2 ozs vegetable oil	10 drops lavender oil
20 drops tea tree oil	10 drops rosemary oil
10 drops lemon oil	

Directions:

Apply mixture to infected person's head and cover with towel for one hour. Follow with regular shampooing. Repeat this process next day.

3. Bug Busting Kit

Community Hygiene Concern, a non-profit making charity dedicated to solving the problem of head lice, has developed the child-friendly Bug Busting Programme. Their Kits are available by prescription from your doctor or by mail order (price £6.45 inc pp) from :

Community Hygiene Concern

6-9 Manor Gardens, London N7 6LA. To pay by credit card or ring their Help Line - 020 7686 4321

Contact Tracing

You need to find where the lice came from or you may be reinfected. The source is probably a family member or close friend, who probably doesn't know they have lice.

Use the check list below to make sure you get in touch with everyone who has been in close (head to head) contact with the infected person. All the people on your list should check themselves and their families for head lice using detection combing. Anyone who is infected with living, moving lice should be treated straight away.

	Name(s)	Contacted
Parents		
Grandparents		
Brothers/Sisters		
Sons/Daughters		
Aunts/Uncles		
Cousins		
Nieces/Nephews		
Friends		
Lodgers		
School/Nursery		
Babysitter		
Clubs		
Rainbows/Guides/Scouts		
Other		

Remember ...

It doesn't matter how many nits you have, or how itchy your scalp is - if you can't find a living, moving louse, you don't have lice.