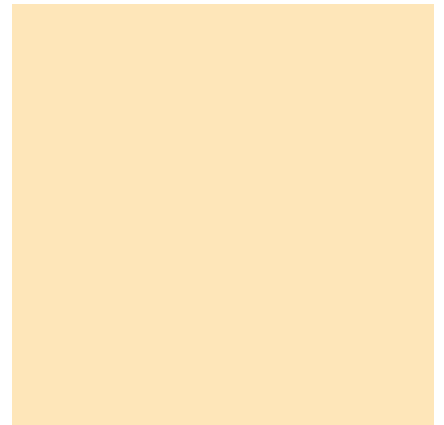




Head lice

A guide for parents



Anyone can get head lice and it is common for school children to get head lice at some time. Head lice can spread when children's hair comes into contact with one another. Although itchy and annoying head lice do not harm your child.

To prevent getting head lice

- Tie your child's hair back
- Tell your child not to share hats or clothes
- Check your child's hair regularly.

If your child has head lice

- Continue to send your child to school
- Inform the school so they can inform others to check their children's hair, your child does not have to be identified
- Do not use household chemicals (such as kerosene or methylated spirits) to treat head lice.

Comb and conditioner method

Head lice breathe through small openings along their abdomens called spiracles. Coating hair in something thick and slimy like a white hair conditioner makes these openings close over, shutting down the louse's breathing for about 20 minutes. Although the louse will not die with this method, it does slow it down so that you can comb them out.

You can do the following:

- Sit your child in a low position in front of you and put on a video or DVD for your child to watch while you work.
- Wrap a towel or kitchen paper around your child's shoulders to catch conditioner spill.

- Apply lots of conditioner to the scalp and massage it through all hair shafts. Lice live close to the scalp, so make sure that you cover the hair shaft close to the scalp. Combing will spread the conditioner onto the rest of the length of hair. Every hair has to be coated to ensure it reaches the lice.
- When the hair is detangled and manageable, use a fine lice comb to comb out each section several times.
- After each comb out, wipe the conditioner on the paper towel. If the child has head lice, you will see them on the towel.

- Keep combing each section of hair until no further lice, nymphs or eggs appear on the paper towel. Often you will see lots of old egg casings that may take a while to remove.
- Once you have combed and re-combed each section of hair, either re-plait or tie it back.

Commercial lice treatment

A commercial lice treatment (available from your local chemist) can be effective, but you will need to read the label and follow the safety instructions carefully.

Generally, treatment must be applied twice (one week apart) to catch all growth stages of the lice.

When using a lice treatment only treat the heads that actually have head lice or else you are really just contributing to lice resistance of treatment to products.

USEFUL TIPS

Head lice often gather on the crown of the head. A good head lice comb should also remove nymphs, the stage between egg and adult louse— teenagers really. These can be difficult to identify with the naked eye, but appear as small insects on the paper towel.

For more information

www.health.nsw.gov.au/headlice

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