

Head Lice

Information for Parents and Guardians

Look out for the signs

- Head lice feed by biting the scalp.
- A child with head lice is probably scratching their head a lot.
- It's not the head lice biting that causes this, but an irritation to the lice poo and saliva, and sometimes the feeling of the head lice moving in the hair. Not nice, but not terrible either.
- Head lice can be found in all types and lengths of hair - having head lice isn't a sign that your hair is dirty.
- They're most common in children aged 3-12 years.

Know what you're looking for

- Head lice are grey or brown coloured insects with six legs.
- They can't fly (they don't have wings) or jump (their legs aren't strong enough) – they get around by crawling.
- Adult head lice are about the size of a sesame seed (2-4mm in length), and their eggs are smaller than a pin head (less than 1mm in size).
- Female head lice lay eggs called nits which hatch after 7-10 days.
- The egg cases and nits are white, so it's easy to mistake them for flakes of dry skin.
- The easiest way to spot head lice is to regularly check a child's hair with a special head lice comb – you are looking for adult head lice, nits or small red blotches on the scalp caused by the biting (pay particular attention to the roots of the hair, the nape of the neck and behind the ears).
- Anyone who is in close contact with children should monitor their hair too – that means the whole family needs to be checked, along with teachers.
- Although head lice can spread between people, they don't carry disease so there's no need to worry.

Wet-combing method

The wet-combing method involves removing the head lice by systematically combing the hair using a special fine-toothed comb with a spacing of less than 0.3mm. Your pharmacist can advise you on which combs are suitable.

No medicated products are necessary for wet combing. This can be beneficial because head lice are becoming more resistant to the insecticides that are commonly used to remove them.

However, the success of the wet-combing method depends on adopting a painstaking approach that involves regular and thorough combing.

The wet-combing method is described below.

- Wash the hair using ordinary shampoo and apply ample conditioner, before using a wide-toothed comb to straighten and untangle the hair.
- Once the comb moves freely through the hair without dragging, switch to the louse detection comb. Make sure that the teeth of the comb slot into the hair at the roots with the bevel-edge of the teeth lightly touching the scalp.
- Draw the comb down to the ends of the hair with every stroke and check the comb for lice.
- Remove lice by wiping or rinsing the comb.
- Work methodically through the hair section by section so that the whole head of hair is combed through.
- Rinse out the conditioner and repeat the combing procedure in the wet hair.
- Repeat the procedure on day five, nine and 13 in order to clear the young lice as they hatch, before they have time to reach maturity.

The time that it will take to comb your child's hair will depend on the type of hair that they have and its length.