

Life cycle of head lice

- A female head louse lays eggs by cementing them to hairs (often close to the root), where they're kept warm by the scalp. The eggs are pinhead-size and difficult to see. After seven to 10 days, the baby lice hatch and the empty eggshells remain glued in place.
- These remains are known as nits. Nits are white and become more noticeable as the hair grows and carries them away from the scalp.
- Head lice feed by biting the scalp and feeding on blood. They take nine to 10 days to become fully grown. Head lice normally only crawl from head to head when they're adults or nearly mature juveniles.
- A female head louse may start to lay eggs from nine days after she's hatched. Therefore, to break the cycle and stop them spreading, they need to be removed within nine days of hatching.
- Headlice 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 headlice.
- Headlice cannot fly, jump or swim, but spread by clambering from head to head. Anyone with hair can catch them, but those who often work and talk closely together have more head to head contact, either at school, at clubs, when visiting friends or during play. Therefore, children particularly, between the ages of 4 and 11 are most commonly affected.
- Headlice feed by biting and sucking blood through the scalp of their host. The female louse lays eggs in sacs (nits) which are very small, dull in colour, and well camouflaged. These are securely glued to hairs where the warmth of the scalp will hatch them out in 7-10 days. Empty egg sacs are white and shiny and may be found further along the hair shaft as the hair grows out. Lice take 6-14 days to become fully grown, after which they are capable of reproduction.
- Headlice are not fussy about hair length or condition. Clean hair is therefore no protection, although regular (e.g. weekly) hair washing and combing sessions offer a good opportunity to detect headlice, and arrange treatment if discovered

Shared hats, headphones and jackets hung close together do not present a risk. This is because head lice that involuntarily fall off the head or clamber on to clothes or other articles, such as pillows or cuddly toys, are dying and harmless.



Magnified Head louse (nit)



MARLBOROUGH COLLEGE
MALAYSIA

HEADLICE INFORMATION

As a school:

We recognize that headlice infestation, particularly when repeated, can cause great distress.

We request that parents check their child's hair regularly, using the combing method described in this leaflet and inform us as soon as they discover any headlice.

We send letters or leaflets out to parents when we have been informed that there is a case of headlice.

We refer families to the school nurse for further advice or support.

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

Detecting Headlice

Headlice 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 very fine-tooth comb. Make sure the teeth of the comb slot into the hair at the roots and draw down the ends of the hair with every stroke. The comb must be fine enough to catch the lice size indicated below 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 – e.g. 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.

If lice are found inform: any clubs your child attends, your child's teacher, wider family members and friends they may have been in contact with.



Treating Headlice

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 headlice at a later date. You may therefore wish to undertake occasional checks during hair washing sessions.

Option 1: Lotions

- Do not use lotions unless you find a living moving louse.
- Check all close family/friends by the “wet combing” method, as described, and treat anyone who is found to have lice at the same time, to prevent re-infection.
- Ensure you have enough lotion to treat all those affected and follow the instructions on the packet carefully, e.g. 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 the 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.

Option 2: The Wet Combing- sometimes known as “Bug Busting” treatment method

Wet combing is a way of removing headlice without having to use a lotion to kill them. Briefly, the method is similar to wet combing (detection combing). But, you need to do this several times,

four days apart. You will need to do this on every member of the household who has headlice. It takes up to an hour to do a wet combing session properly. You need the correct very fine-tooth comb as described earlier. Only one comb is needed for a family, as it is washable and reusable.

- Wash the hair in the normal way with ordinary shampoo.
- Rinse out the shampoo and put on lots of ordinary conditioner.
- Comb the hair with a normal comb to get rid of tangles.
- When the hair is untangled switch to the detection comb.
- Slot the teeth of the very fine tooth comb into the hair at the roots so it is touching the scalp.
- Draw the comb through to the tips of the hair.
- Make sure that all parts of the hair are combed by working around the head.
- Check the comb for lice after each stroke. A magnifying glass may help.
- If you see any lice, clean the comb by wiping it on a tissue, or rinse it before the next stroke.
- After you have combed the whole head, rinse out the conditioner.

You need to do the above routine at least four times, every four days. The number of sessions required depends on the last time you see lice:

- The first combing session should remove all hatched headlice but does not remove eggs. Therefore lice that hatch from eggs after the first session may still be present.
- Subsequent sessions clear newly hatched lice. Keep doing the combing sessions every four days until you have had three sessions where no lice are detected.
- Once you have had three sessions where you do not see any lice, it usually means that you are then free of lice.