

Head Lice

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS AND GUARDIANS

Head lice occur commonly in children and their presence does not mean that those affected are in any way dirty. However, head lice can cause distress and discomfort. They represent a community rather than a school problem, but are seen at school because the age group most affected is 7 – 12 years old. Apart from distributing information, school staff can do little to control head lice. **THE RESPONSIBILITY LIES WITH PARENTS AND GUARDIANS.** The 'nit inspections' which were carried out in schools many years ago achieved little and the problem was no less common than it is today.

Head lice can only be caught from head to head contact. They live close to the scalp and are quick moving insects, slightly smaller than a match head. They lay eggs which are small, skin coloured and well camouflaged, glued to the hair close to the scalp.. After the egg hatches, the empty egg shell, or 'nit' stays glued to the hair and moves away from the scalp as the hair grows. The 'nits' are white and shiny and easier to see. They are harmless and can persist for weeks after the lice have been treated successfully. Lice are difficult to see on the hair as they are grey or brown. Only about one third of children with lice will complain of itching which develops some weeks after the hair becomes affected. Lice can leave a deposit like black powder on pillows or collars.

DETECTION

It is a good idea to get into the habit of 'wet 'combing' children's hair twice a week, even when you do not suspect the presence of lice. After shampooing with an ordinary shampoo, apply ordinary conditioner to wet hair. Use a fine-toothed comb and comb from the roots of the hair in sections over a white surface such as a sink or paper towel. If you think your child has lice, you can buy a special detection-comb from the pharmacist. If you comb out wriggling insects you should treat the child's hair. By themselves, nits do not indicate an active problem. If you are not sure about what you have combed out, using a piece of sticky tape, catch a combing and seek the advice of your school nurse or health visitor.

It is important to check the hair of all other members of the household if lice are found, and to let friends and relatives who have close contact with your child know so that they can check too. Remember, head lice are common, their presence does not mean that your child is in any way dirty, and nothing to be ashamed about.

TREATMENT

YOU SHOULD ONLY TREAT PEOPLE WHO ARE FOUND TO HAVE HEAD LICE.

Consult your doctor before treating babies below the age of six months or if you are pregnant or breast-feeding.

There are many recommended treatments available from your pharmacist. If the person to be treated has skin problems or asthma, please either seek medical advice or speak to the pharmacist.

SHAMPOOS AND LICE REPELLANTS ARE NOT EFFECTIVE ON THEIR OWN IN TREATING HEAD LICE.

Apply the solutions as directed on the bottles, paying particular attention to making sure that the scalp is fully covered right through to the ends of the hair. Combing through longer hair may require more of the solution.

N.B Different solutions may offer different instructions.

Remember to:

- ✓ Check all contacts
- ✓ Treat all contacts who have head lice
- ✓ Use enough lotion on hair and follow the instructions carefully.

Even after successful treatment, itching can persist for several weeks. **After you have used the treatment continue to wet comb the hair with conditioner at least twice a week. If you comb out lice (nits persist for weeks and does not mean that the treatment has not worked) ask your school nurse for advice before using another lotion.**

After the problem has cleared up continue to wet-comb twice weekly.