

Dear Parents

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 the parents and guardians. The "nit inspections", which were carried 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 eggshell, 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 has become 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 piece of paper. 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 the 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 themselves too. Remember that head lice are common; their presence does not mean that your child is in any way dirty, and is nothing to be ashamed about.



TREATMENT

You should treat only the 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.

The recommended treatments are prepared in the form of lotions (one is in mousse form) and are available from your pharmacist. The water-based products can be used safely by people with skin problems and asthma.

Shampoos and lice-repellents are not effective in treating head lice.

Apply the liquid to partings of the DRY hair made at close (1–2cm) intervals, and work drops of liquid into the scalp. You will need a whole bottle of lotion for each head. More than one bottle may be needed if the hair is long. Let the lotion dry naturally overnight (for mousse follow directions on the label) and shampoo the next day. Your child should return to school after you have carried out the treatment once. After one week, repeat the treatment once more.

Remember to:

- Check all contacts
- Treat all contacts who have head lice
- Use enough lotion on dry hair and leave it over night (for mousse leave on as directed by label)

Even after successful treatment, itching can persist for several weeks.

After you have used the treatment twice, continue to wet-comb the hair with conditioner at least twice a week. If you comb out *lice* (nits can persist for weeks and do 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.

**Our School Nurse, Sarah Foster, can be contacted at the
School Nurses Team, H+E Hospital**

Or telephone – 01279 827909