

## How can I keep my child free from Head Lice?

### Answer:

Head Lice infestation is a common problem throughout the world in all socioeconomic groups. Studies have shown that around one in four primary school aged children in Australia have head lice.

There is no way to prevent head lice so it's important to check your child's hair regularly even when you don't think they have head lice.

Head lice infection can be a sensitive issue for parents and your children and can be difficult to manage.

Head lice are only found on the human head or hair. Head lice do not live on furniture, hats, bedding, carpet or anywhere else in the environment. Treating anything other than the human head does not eradicate head lice.

### **It is not recommended to exclude children with head lice from school due to the following reasons:**

- Head lice are not known to transmit diseases.
- Exclusion from school or childcare is not an effective way of breaking the cycle of head lice infestations.
- Head lice eradication is most effective if the whole school community works together to treat the infestation.

For further information on how to best tackle head lice in schools, please see Nitbusters <http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/environment/headlice/Pages/nitbusters.aspx>

There are two main treatment options to remove head lice '**Mechanical removal**' and '**Chemical removal**'.

#### **Mechanical removal** or 'comb and conditioner' method

What you need for this method:

- Normal comb to detangle hair prior to using metal lice comb
- Fine toothed metal lice comb (available from your local chemist or online)
- Conditioner - buy a cheap brand as you will be needing a lot of it, and preferably one that is white to make spotting the lice easier
- White paper towel

Mechanical removal involves applying conditioner to dry hair. Cover all of the hair with conditioner, detangle hair with normal comb and separate into sections. Then, using a fine long toothed metal lice comb, comb through the hair in sections. The conditioner does not kill lice but stuns them for about 20 minutes enabling easier removal. The long toothed metal comb will remove nits and the stunned head lice. Wipe the comb on a white tissue and check for any lice or nits. Keep combing until no more appear on the tissue. This

method should be done every second or third day until no nits and lice remain, usually about 7 to 10 days.

This method is the preferred way to detect and treat head lice because it is effective, does not contribute to insecticide resistance in head lice and also presents a low risk of skin irritation.

This method also helps manage head lice before they become established on the head. Simply keep a good head lice comb in the shower and every time your family washes their hair use the fine comb through the hair. This will ensure lice are "caught" before they lay too many eggs. If your children are old enough to wash their own hair encourage them to use the comb themselves. Or keep a comb handy to where you wash your children's hair and use it every shampoo.

### **Chemical removal**

What you need for this method:

- Normal comb to detangle hair prior to using metal lice comb
- Chemical treatment containing synthetic or natural insecticides that kill head lice (talk to your local pharmacist to identify the treatments containing insecticides)
- Fine toothed metal lice comb (available from your local chemist or online)
- White paper towel

If you choose to use a chemical treatment, remember to follow the instructions carefully. You will also need to comb through the hair to ensure the treatment is working. If you find dead lice it means the product has worked. If you find live lice, the treatment has not worked. Don't be tempted to re-apply or over-apply the same chemical if it doesn't appear to be working. Instead switch to another treatment that uses a different chemical compound or use the 'comb and conditioner method' as described under the mechanical removal. It is very important that you repeat the chemical treatment in seven days to kill any newly hatched eggs as most chemical treatments will not kill the eggs (nits).

Once your child is free of lice and nits, remember to regularly check with a fine toothed head lice comb and conditioner as described above. Early detection and treatment will prevent re-infestation of other family members and classmates.

### **What to do with bedding and clothing**

Research suggests that bed linen, hats, clothing and furniture do not harbour or transmit lice or nits and that there is no benefit in washing them as a treatment option. Nits and lice only live on the human head. They quickly dehydrate and die if removed from the head.

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/parents/health/Pages/headlice.aspx>

<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/environment/headlice/Pages/treatment.aspx>