



Head lice information

January 2020

Head lice - The community's problem

The head louse only affects humans and cannot be passed on to or caught from animals. Head lice are tiny, wingless insects that cannot jump or fly. They are colourless when first hatched and take on the colour of the hair after feeding on blood from the scalp several times a day. The louse grips onto the hair with six claws. Lice are spread by direct head to head contact with an infected person. Having lice is like other infections, you catch them from someone else, who could be a friend or relative with clean hair. It is important that all family members be checked every week.

Detection of head lice

You can apply conditioner to dry hair, or wash the hair and rinse as normal, then rub conditioner in. With a nit comb, carefully comb the hair, section by section, right from the scalp to the end of the hair. Observe the comb for lice after each stroke and wipe it clean with a tissue.

Treatment of head lice

If eggs (grey/brown and oval) or nits (white empty eggs) are observed they may not be readily removed by combing and may require removal by hand. Grasp the shell between the thumb and forefinger and draw it along the hair strand. Continue to comb through the hair until the whole head has been combed. Conditioner is very helpful as it makes the hair too slippery for the louse to run along so it cannot easily escape the comb. It also makes combing long hair a smoother process. When combing is completed rinse the hair with clean water. Chemical treatments can be purchased over the counter. It is known, however, that some head lice are resistant to these and, therefore, no chemical preparation is one hundred percent effective. It is necessary to **repeat this procedure every 2-3 days for at least 3 weeks**, so that any lice emerging from eggs can be removed, along with any lice that may have escaped the first couple of sessions.

Parents are the 'Front Line' of head louse detection and management. The old fashioned system of mass head checks in schools is not effective in managing head lice infection. If all children and adults put conditioner on their hair once a week and combed it out with a fine toothed nit comb, head lice would become a minor problem. Newly invaded lice would be detected and removed before they had time to lay eggs.

Help and advice

If you need any advice on head lice please contact the school nurse, Laura Devereaux, on 07976567932. Alternatively you can access more information from Community Hygiene Concern Help Line on 0207 686 4321 or visit www.nhs.uk/conditions/head-lice-and-nits

Email: info@st-james.dudley.sch.uk Website: www.st-james.dudley.sch.uk



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