

# Head Lice

# FACTS



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Headlice are a common problem all over the world. They are small, flat insects about 2–3 mm long that breed all year round.

Headlice:

- live on the human scalp – which provides food and warmth for their eggs to hatch
- feed on human blood through the scalp 5 or 6 times a day
- cannot jump, fly or swim
- do not carry disease
- remain on the head after swimming or bathing/showering.

Headlice may cause itching but do not usually cause disease. Occasionally scalp infections requiring treatment may develop.

## **Life** CYCLE

Female lice lay about 7–10 eggs each night. Eggs are laid close to the scalp. Each egg is firmly glued to a hair.

The eggs (nits) are small and hard (like a grain of salt) and are normally pale grey in colour. After hatching, the nits (empty egg cases) are white.

Eggs hatch in 9 days, and a louse will live for 40 days.

Head lice are sometimes given other names like ‘nits’, ‘kutis’, ‘kutu bugs’ or ‘head louse’.

# Looking FOR HEAD LICE

In school age children, check for head lice regularly once a week.

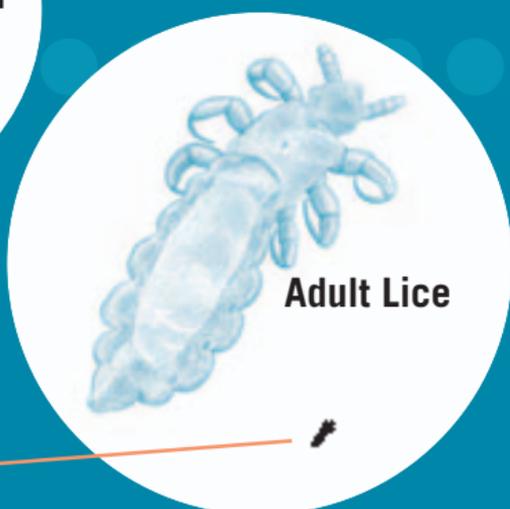
Look over the scalp for insects or eggs, especially:

- around the hairline at the back of the neck
- behind the ears
- on the crown.

Use a fine-tooth comb on wet hair to find lice. Scratch marks or a rash can be a sign that your child has headlice. Not all children complain of itchy heads.

Eggs are laid next to the scalp and hair grows about 1 cm a month. Therefore any eggs found more than 1 cm from the scalp will have hatched and died.

You can remove these eggs. You do not need to treat again if treatment is completed.



**Actual size**

## When TO TREAT

- If you find a LIVE insect on the scalp
- If you find eggs within 1 cm of the scalp.

## How TO TREAT

Speak to your pharmacist, doctor, or practice nurse for advice about what treatment to use and how to use it.

You need a special shampoo or lotion (containing insecticide) available only from your pharmacist or doctor to kill both the insects and eggs.

Always follow the manufacturer's recommendations supplied with individual treatments. Some treatments are used twice, 7–10 days apart.

After using shampoo, dead eggs are left. Treatments and combs will not remove dead eggs. The eggs can each be removed between finger and thumb. Vinegar may help to loosen the glue the eggs are held on with but will not kill them. Recheck your children's heads after a week and make sure they brush their hair every night.

Wet combing may be effective if done properly. Some herbal treatments and remedies may be effective. Talk to the pharmacist, your doctor or public health nurse for advice.

## What DOES NOT WORK

Ordinary shampoo or soap will not kill head lice.

## DO NOT Use

Do not use flyspray, kerosene or animal remedies because these can be dangerous for children.

# TO prevent HEAD LICE AND reduce THE SPREAD

It is impossible to prevent head lice completely because they are common in the community and children often come in contact with each other at school and at other activities.

- Brush hair every evening. This may help kill or injure lice and stop them from laying eggs. Bend the head forward with hair hanging down. Brush hair with a firm bristled brush from scalp outwards, especially around the hairline behind the ears and the back of the neck.
- Don't share brushes and combs. Everyone in the family should use their own brush and comb.

Because lice do not live beyond 48 hours off the scalp, it is rarely necessary for additional washing and cleaning of other articles.

- Children should hang their clothes on their own hook at school.
- Children should keep their clothes apart from other children's in swimming changing sheds.
- If LIVE lice or eggs are found:
  - check everyone in the house
  - ask friends and other contacts of your child at school or preschool to check their children.
- Treat all affected family members at the same time. This may minimise chance of re-infestation.

# The CHECKLIST

- Check every week. During outbreaks, check daily after live head lice are found and treated.
- Brush hair every evening to reduce head lice numbers.
- Treat if you find LIVE insects or eggs within 1 cm of the scalp.
- Treat using a shampoo from your pharmacist. Repeat a week later.
- Follow the instructions carefully.
- Ask your pharmacist for advice and information.

## Re SCHOOLS

When your child is treated for head lice, alert school contacts and friends. If there is a head lice outbreak, the school may inform parents and caregivers or send information home to remind parents about head lice.

Children should not be excluded from school because of head lice.

If head lice are a particular problem in any school, the public health nurse may assist the school to provide information and advice to parents.

New Zealand Government



MANATŪ HAUORA