



## INFORMATION ON HEAD LICE

### COMMON QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

#### **Do lice fly?**

Head lice do not have wings so they cannot fly.

#### **Do lice jump?**

Head lice do not jump because they do not have 'knees'. In order to jump you need to have joints that bend in opposite directions. The joints in lice legs all go in one direction.

#### **So how do lice move around?**

Head lice CRAWL very fast and require head to head contact for transmission. This is why it is widely seen amongst small children (the way they play) and not so much in adolescents or adults.

#### **Do lice live in carpets, clothes, hats or sheets?**

Head lice require blood to survive. They feed off the head 3-4 times a day. Without blood, lice will dehydrate in 6 hours in a dry climate and 24 hours in a humid climate.



Eggs require warmth to hatch. That is why the eggs are laid close to the scalp. The further away from the scalp, the less likely they will survive.

#### **Is it true that head lice only like clean hair?**

Head lice are not selective. They do not care if you earn \$15k or \$100k a year, if the hair is long, short, blonde, brown, washed this morning or last week. As long as they are warm and have blood to drink, then they do not care.

#### **What treatment kills 100% of lice or eggs?**

There is no single treatment that kills 100% of lice or eggs. The most effective way to treat head lice is to physically remove them. So whether you use a chemical treatment, or conditioner/comb method – YOU NEED TO COMB OUT THE EGGS.

#### **Is there a treatment that prevents head lice?**

There is no research to prove that chemical or herbal therapies can prevent lice.

### **How does the conditioner/comb method work?**

It's a very effective way of finding tricky lice. Hair conditioner does not kill lice, but it does stun them for 20 minutes, meaning they do not move around, and it is difficult for them to hang on. This gives you time to comb through the hair with a lice comb. It's a cheaper method, but you have to do it more regularly.

### **How does a chemical treatment work?**

Only use products that are licensed or registered for head lice. There are four different active chemicals that target head lice; each works differently and aims to kill lice and/or eggs. It is still important to comb out as many eggs as possible.

### **Do some products work better than others?**

In order to survive, head lice have built up a resistance to some agents. It is important to check if a treatment has worked, and if not, treat again with a different produce with a different chemical agent.

### **Why do you have to treat again in seven days' time?**

Head lice eggs take 6-7 days to hatch. And when you treat, it's easy to miss an egg or two. By treating again in seven days, you are aiming to kill and comb out any lice that have since hatched from eggs that were missed.

### **Should I treat everyone in the family?**

It is important to check for head lice in each family member. Do not treat if they do not have an infection.



### **What is the best way to clean head lice combs?**

Water greater than 60 degrees for 30 seconds will kill lice. HOWEVER THIS IS TOO HOT FOR A SHOWER OR BATH. This does, however, mean that lice combs can be placed in boiling water and the pillowcases can be laundered in a hot wash.

### **What should I wash or treat at home?**

Because head lice only live for a short time off the head, just wash the pillow slip on the hot cycle or place in a clothes dryer.

### **Why does my child keep getting re-infected?**

Re-infection is the least likely reason for lice returning in a week's time. It only takes two eggs that did not die, or were not removed in the original treatment. This results in the eggs hatching and the lifecycle occurring all over again. You must re-treat (regardless of treatment method) seven days after the first treatment.

Using the conditioner/comb method every week is a great way to detect any head lice early and minimize the problem. Tying back long hair can also help prevent the spread of head lice.

Many parents will complain that they are doing the right thing but other parents aren't. Placing the blame will not achieve anything. Instead of pointing the finger, help each other!

A school that has a head lice education program and policy in place is a proactive school attempting to help families address a common health concern. Work with them!

## **TREATING AND CONTROLLING HEADLICE**

Head lice have been around for thousands of years. As with any animal, they learn to change and adapt to their environment in order to survive. We are never going to be completely rid of them, but we can CONTROL them.

Head lice is not a life threatening health condition. And as with similar health conditions such as scabies and ringworm, it is a parent's responsibility to treat and care for their child.

Children do not catch head lice from school, they catch it from other children. School just happens to be where children congregate. Therefore it is not the fault of schools.

Children with head lice are required under the Health (Infectious Diseases) Regulations to be excluded from school until treatment has commenced. These regulations are written by the Department of Human Services and adopted and supported by the Department of Education and Training.

### **Treatment Regimes**

Chemical                      Treat and comb to remove the lice and eggs;  
And repeat in 7 days

Conditioner/comb              Comb to remove the lice and eggs; and repeat every 2 days  
for 10 days.

## **FINDING HEAD LICE**

Many lice do not cause an itch, so you have to look carefully to find them.

Head lice are found on the hair itself and move to the scalp to feed. They have six legs which end in a claw and rarely fall from the head. Louse eggs (also called nits) are laid within 1.5 cm of the scalp and are firmly attached to the hair. They resemble dandruff, but can't be brushed off.

Lice can crawl and hide. The easiest and most effective way to find them is to follow these steps:

- Step 1: Comb any type of hair conditioner on to dry, brushed (detangled) hair. This stuns the lice and makes it difficult for them to grip the hair or crawl around.
- Step 2: Now comb sections of the hair with a fine tooth, head lice comb.
- Step 3: Wipe the conditioner from the comb onto a paper towel or tissue.
- Step 4: Look on the tissue and on the comb for lice and eggs.
- Step 5: Repeat the combing for every part of the head at least 4 or 5 times.

If lice or eggs are found, the child's hair should be treated.

If the child has been treated recently and you only find empty hatched eggs, you may not have to treat as the empty eggs could be from a previous episode.

## **TREATING HEAD LICE**

Concentrate on the head – there is no evidence to suggest that you need to clean the house or classroom.

If you choose not to use an insecticide, the conditioner and comb method can be used every second day until there have been no live lice found for ten days.

Head lice products must be applied to all parts of the hair and scalp.

No treatment kills all the eggs so treatment must involve two applications seven days apart.

The purpose of the first treatment is to kill all lice, the second treatment is to kill young lice hatched over the next six days.

Cover the person's eyes, for example with a towel, while the treatment is being applied.

If you are using lotions, apply the product to dry hair.

For shampoos, wet the hair, but use the least amount of water possible.

Apply the treatment near the scalp, using an ordinary comb to cover the hair from root to tip. Repeat this several times until all the hair is covered.

There is no need to treat the whole family, unless they also have head lice.

Only the pillowcase requires specific laundering; either wash it in hot water (at least 60°C) or dry it using a clothes dryer on the hot or warm setting.

## **TESTING RESISTANCE**

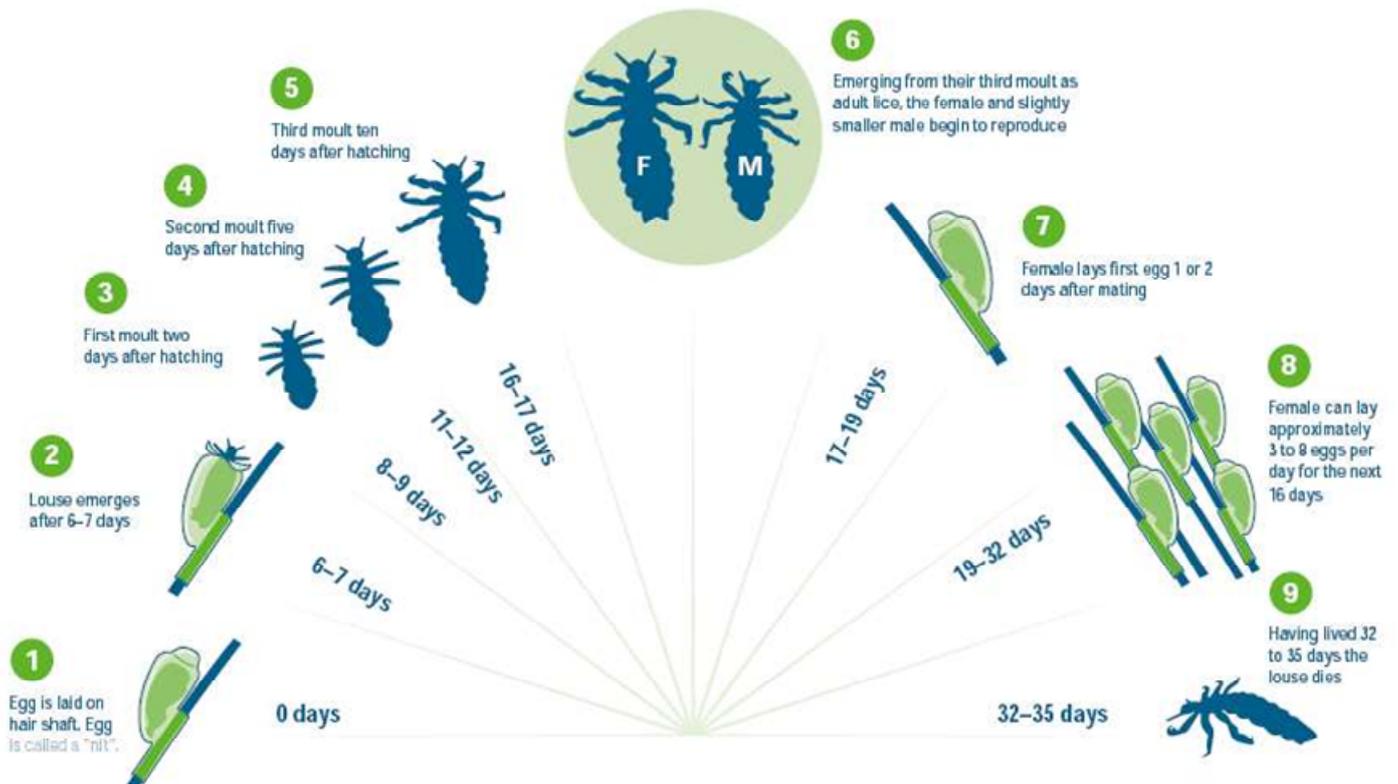
Head lice products belong in one of the following categories depending on the active compound they contain.

- Pyrethrins
- Synthetic pyrethroids (permethrin, bioallethrin)
- Organophosphates (malathion or malathion)
- Herbal with or without natural (non-chemical) pyrethrins.

Insecticide resistance is common, so you should test if lice are dead. If they are, treat again in seven days using the same product. If the lice are not dead, the treatment has not worked and the lice are resistant to the product and all the products containing the same active compound. Wash off the product and treat as soon as possible using a product containing a different active compound. If the insecticide has worked, the lice will be dead within 20 minutes.

Any head lice product could cause a reaction and should be used with care by women who are pregnant or breastfeeding, children less than 12 months old and people with allergies, asthma or open wounds on the scalp. If you are unsure, please check with your pharmacist or doctor.

## THE LIFE CYCLE OF A HEAD LICE *Pediculus humanus capitis*



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