

Head Lice Information Sheet

Head Louse- What is it?

A head louse is a small insect no more than 3mm in length when fully grown, with short legs and is grey/brown in colour. Lice cannot hop or fly.

It has a life cycle of 35-40 days and when mature can procreate after 10 days.

A female louse lays 6-8 eggs daily and has an incubation period of 7-8 days.

The egg is firmly attached to a single hair close to the scalp to aid incubation and after hatching the empty white eggshells remain glued to the hair. These are commonly known as nits.

The louse feeds solely on blood obtained from the scalp and may feed 4-5 times a day.

Hair growth is 1/2 -1 inch per month, therefore a nit positioned 1" from the scalp indicates infestation took place some weeks ago.

Methods of Detection

Check your child's hair daily.

- ⤴ Itching is a common sign.
- ⤴ Comb hair over pale cloth or paper and check for lice having fallen out.
- ⤴ Lice shed their skins at night, so examination of pillowcases for black dust-like deposits is helpful.
- ⤴ When washing hair watch out for dead lice in the water.

Prevention

Responsibility for prevention of head lice lies with the parents. The logic behind this is borne out by the fact that 90% of head lice are discovered by parents and they are undoubtedly the most effective detectors. Insecticides should be used only for treatment and not prevention.

Clean hair does not prevent head lice infestation. Lice prefer clean hair to greasy hair as it is easier to reach the scalp from which they feed. The best and only preventative measure is good daily brushing and checking with a fine tooth comb [available from a pharmacy].

Brushing will damage the louse and it will die. Use of a bristle brush is more effective. Always dampen hair before fine combing, it is easier to work on hair that is damp.

Treatment

- ⤴ Lotion available from the pharmacy
- ⤴ Follow instructions on the label
- ⤴ Check all family members
- ⤴ Wash and renew fine tooth comb and brushes frequently
- ⤴ Do not apply lotion unless you find a moving, living louse on the child's head.

Detection is the most effective method of control. Eliminate headlice before they take hold. They can cause embarrassment or uncomfortable itching.