

# HEAD LICE – THE FACTS

## What are head lice?

Head lice are tiny-fast moving grey/brown insects and can be as big as a match head when fully grown.

## Where do you find head lice?

- ❑ In the hair of children and adults in the general community
- ❑ Not only a problem in schools – half of all reported cases of head lice are from pre-school children or adults
- ❑ Head lice can be passed on wherever people meet and very close head to head contact occurs, i.e. at a party, at school, in the park, at home

The school nurse does not examine children's hair for head lice because this has proved to be an ineffective policy.

## What is a nit?

A nit is the empty egg shell of the head louse which, when laid, is firmly glued to the hair close to the scalp. They cannot be brushed off the hair like dandruff.

- ❑ **Encourage everyone – children and adults – to check their head regularly**
- ❑ **Only treat if live lice are found**

## How are head lice spread?

They crawl from one head to another when in close contact with each other.

## How do you know if you have got head lice?

The aim is to check hair regularly.

Weekly systematic combing is the best method of detection, by combing wet conditioned hair in sections with a head lice detection comb. The conditioner helps prevent the head lice from moving.

Parents should regularly check their child's hair for lice. If live lice are found then treatment is necessary.

## How do I get rid of them?

There are two methods to eradicate head lice. It is important that whichever method is chosen, it is carried out systematically.

### ❑ **Lotion/Liquid treatment**

There are two types, insecticides containing chemicals (which kill lice and eggs) and insecticides that do not contain chemicals (which kill lice).

If you find your child has live head lice treat their infested head with a preparation available from the chemist (some are only available on prescription).

Carefully read and follow the instructions on the packet to ensure the treatment is effective.

- One treatment of chemical insecticide consists of two applications seven days apart with a standard application time of 12 hours or overnight. Non chemical insecticides should be left to dry for 8 hours or overnight. A second application is required to kill lice hatching from eggs that may have survived the first treatment.
- Shampoos, mousses, rinses or products that are put on the head less than this are not recommended.
- Hair that has been in contact with chlorine or conditioners should be washed with shampoo only, rinsed and left to dry before applying the lotion

### ❑ **Wet combing/bug busting**

Condition wet hair to make it slippery and to immobilise the lice, then comb through with a head lice detection comb to remove all live lice. It is important to comb all the hair by using a systematic sectioning method so that no area of the head is missed.

Repeat every three days for a fortnight. This breaks the life cycle by catching new lice as they hatch out. This prevents them from laying eggs.

Re-usable bug busting kits are available from most high street chemists.

Further advice is obtainable from your School Nurse; Health Visitor; Pharmacist or "Bug Busters" Community Hygiene Concern, Helpline 020 7686 7600/4321

## To reduce the spread of head lice:

- ❑ Check your child's hair at least once a week, using a head lice detection comb, when the hair is wet
  - ❑ Treat everyone affected promptly if live lice are found
  - ❑ Tell everyone that has been in close contact with the individual so that they can take action as well
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- ❑ Lice do not jump or fly
  - ❑ You don't catch them from animals

Further advice is available from your:

School Nurse  
Health Visitor  
Pharmacist

or

"Bug Busters"  
Community Hygiene Concern  
Helpline 020 7686 7600/4321

More detailed guidelines are available from  
SWLondon HPU 020 8682 6132



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## The Facts

An information leaflet for  
schools, nurseries, health  
professionals and parents in  
Merton, Sutton, Wandsworth,  
Croydon, Kingston & Richmond.