Appendix 3

Factsheet on Head lice

Introduction

• Head lice can affect people of all ages. They spread by climbing from head to head. This can happen anywhere when heads are close together – not just at school
• They cannot jump, fly or swim. They don’t care if the hair is clean or dirty, or if it is short or long, straight or curly
• Head lice are small insects that stay close to the scalp. They can move quite quickly
• Nits are the egg cases left behind after a louse has hatched. Nits tend to be pale in colour. They do not move
• Head lice can live for up to 40 days
• Female lice may lay 8 or 9 eggs each night
• Eggs take 7 to 10 days to hatch. Within 36 hours the baby louse has changed colour to blend in with the hair colour
• The young louse takes 7 to 10 days to reach adulthood and moults 3 times during this time

The best way for families to stop head louse infestation is to check their heads regularly using a detector comb. Each person should have their own comb. Try to do this at least three times a week.

How to detect Head lice

You need a fine-toothed detector comb

There are a number of different designs available. The more teeth per comb, the easier it will be to use. Combs with longer teeth are generally more effective than those with shorter teeth. It is easier to reach the scalp with longer toothed combs.

There is no evidence that battery operated combs are more effective than ordinary plastic or metal toothed combs.

Wash the hair and leave it wet. If conditioner is required to loosen tangles only use a minimal amount.
Comb the hair with an ordinary comb to remove any knots.
Using the detector comb, start at the top of the head making sure that the comb is touching the scalp, slowly comb to the ends of the hair.
Wipe the teeth of the comb with a tissue after each stroke and check for lice.
Repeat until the whole head has been checked. This should take about 15 minutes.

**If there are head lice you will find them on the teeth of the comb. If this happens you will then need to check the whole family.**

- **NEVER** use insecticides to prevent infestation.

The best way to do this is to use your detector comb at least three times a week.

**How to Treat Head lice**

If you find something with the comb but don’t know what it is, stick it on some tape and take it to your pharmacist, GP or nurse.

If you have found that someone in the family has head lice, you must check everyone else, and treat everyone who has head lice at the same time.

If the person has been swimming within two days of the treatment the hair must be thoroughly washed to remove traces of chlorine.

Water-soluble lotions and cream rinses are recommended for people with asthma and are generally better tolerated than spirit-based ones. Shampoos are not recommended.

Lotion must be applied to DRY hair in a well-ventilated room. Lotion should remain on the hair for 12 hours. Cream rinse preparations are applied to damp hair and left on for 10 minutes and then rinsed off.

The lotion should be applied by hand to the hair and rubbed into the scalp. Remember that head lice like to stay close to the skin and this is where the live eggs will be as well. Pay special attention to the areas around the ears and at the nape of the neck.

After the whole scalp is wet, comb the hair through with an ordinary comb and apply more lotion so that the whole length of hair is wet.

Allow the hair to dry naturally, and avoid naked flames.

**You will need at least one small bottle of lotion per head. More if the hair is very thick or long.**

Use the detector comb at least three times in the next 7 days to remove dead head lice and identify any that are still alive.

**Repeat the treatment 7 days later using another bottle of the same lotion.**

Some head lice infestations can be treated with regular fine combing using a detector comb.

**Prevention**

**Remember that successful treatment will not prevent further infestation.**

Regular use of the detection comb will prevent further head louse infestation.

Use the detection comb each evening after there has been an opportunity for contact with a person with head lice during the day. This could be at school, playing with
friends, or whilst visiting relatives.

If large head lice are found there will only be a few. You will know where the person has caught them too! These few head lice will not have a chance to lay eggs if they are removed from the head. By removing them you have sorted the problem out.

Even if the head lice have managed to lay some eggs you can prevent the infestation from getting worse by continuing to comb. Where possible comb daily or at least every 2 to 3 days. Any eggs that were laid will hatch after about 7 days. They then take another week or so to reach maturity, and they can’t lay any more eggs until then. If you comb frequently you will remove the young head lice before they are old enough to breed.

There is no ‘magic cure’ for head lice.

Some people recommend natural remedies. These usually depend on oil or lotion being combed through the hair and it is the combing that helps, as none of these herbal remedies have proven insecticidal properties.

Can’t get rid of Head lice?  

DID YOU

• Use enough lotion? On dry hair?
• Leave it 12 hours? Dry naturally?
• Check ALL close family & friends including adults?

Are you using a comb daily?

For further help ask your GP, nurse or health visitor