



Head Lice

Introduction

The aim of this Policy is to ensure a consistent, coordinated and cooperative approach to managing head lice in the school community.

What are head lice and nits?

- **Head lice** are tiny grey/brown insects. They are about the size of a sesame seed (the seeds on burger buns). Head lice cling to hairs, but stay close to the scalp which they feed off. Head lice lay eggs which hatch after 7-10 days. It takes about 10 days for a newly hatched louse to grow to an adult and start to lay eggs.
- **Nits** are the empty white egg shells which are left when the lice hatch. Nits can look like dandruff, but stick strongly to hair. Unlike dandruff, you cannot easily brush out nits.

Who gets head lice?

Head lice are common in children, but can affect anyone of any age. They are not a sign of dirty hair or poor hygiene. Close 'hair to hair' contact is usually needed to pass lice on. Head lice cannot jump or fly, but walk from one head to another. They soon die when away from hair, and do not live in clothes, bedding, etc. Most head lice infections are caught from family or close friends who are not aware that they have head lice.

What are the problems with head lice?

Most people with head lice do not have any symptoms. An itchy scalp occurs in about 1 in 3 cases. This is due to an allergy to the lice, not due to them biting. It often takes about three months for itch to develop after you are infested with lice. Therefore, you may not notice that you have head lice for a while, and you may have passed them on to others for some time. Head lice and nits do not wash off with normal shampoo. Head lice do not cause any other medical problems. In most cases the head is not 'crawling with lice'. Commonly, there are less than 12 lice present.

How can you tell if you have head lice?

Head lice are difficult to find just by looking in the hair. If you suspect that your child (or you yourself) has head lice, it is best to do 'detection combing'. Some people advise that you do this to children's hair regularly, about once a week.

Detection combing:

- Wash the hair in the normal way with ordinary shampoo.
- Rinse out the shampoo and put on lots of ordinary conditioner.
- Comb the hair with a normal comb to get rid of tangles.
- When the hair is untangled switch to a detection comb. This is a special fine-toothed comb that you can buy at pharmacies. (The teeth of normal combs are too far apart.)
- Slot the teeth of the detection comb into the hair at the roots so it is touching the scalp.
- Draw the detection comb through to the tips of the hair.
- Repeat this in all directions until you have combed all the hair.
- Check the comb for lice after each stroke. A magnifying glass may help.
- If you see any lice, clean the comb by wiping it on a tissue or rinse it before the next stroke.
- Comb over a white surface such as white paper. This is so that any head lice that are flicked out by the comb are easy to see.
- After the whole head has been combed, rinse out the conditioner.



- While the hair is still wet, use an ordinary comb to get rid of tangles.
- Repeat the detection combing in the rinsed hair to check for any lice that you might have missed the first time.
- It takes about 15-30 minutes to do detection combing, depending on how thick the hair is.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Parents' responsibilities are:

- To learn about head lice infestation and management by reading the <https://cks.nice.org.uk/head-lice#!diagnosis> or <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/head-lice-and-nits/>
- To regularly check their child's hair for head lice infestation
- To treat their child's hair immediately if the child has head lice
- To inform the school and other close contacts if their child has a head lice infestation and to confirm that treatment of their child's hair has commenced.
- To be aware of and follow the school's head lice management policy

The School Nurse's role is:

- To provide information, advice and education to parents and the school community about head lice management;
- To provide additional advice for families experiencing persistent head lice infestation;
- A contact person for staff and parents for dealing with head lice issues. She is responsible for organising dissemination of head lice information, arranging head lice education and management activities, and following up head lice letters to parents.
- Treating and monitoring boarders with head lice

The School's responsibility is:

- To develop, implement and maintain a head lice management policy;
- To ensure that parents and staff are aware of the school's head lice policy.
- To support and advise parents who have ongoing difficulty in managing their child's head lice infestation.

How Head Lice information is disseminated

The School takes the following steps to ensure that accurate up-to-date head lice treatment advice is provided to the school community:

- Information is sent home to the parents of a child with head lice, and to the parents of the other children in the same class, accompanied by an explanatory letter.
- Updates in treatment and policy changes will be provided by school newsletter, posters or on school intranet

What happens when a child is found to have head lice?

The School undertakes the following steps to ensure that a clearly defined process is followed when a child is found to have head lice:

- The student is given a brief, age-appropriate explanation about the head lice.
- Parents will be contacted either by telephone or a letter is sent home with the student at the end of the day and asked to treat their child that day.
- Parents of the other students in the class are sent an information letter on the same day, asking them to check their child's hair for head lice and advising them how to do this more effectively, using the recommended hair conditioner method.

As a last resort only - where considered appropriate by the Principal and School Nurse, the family may be referred to public health e.g. where a child is experiencing ongoing psychological distress, or if infected sores result from untreated head lice infestation and the sores remain untreated. Informing parents of this decision prior to referral is at the discretion of the Principal.

Additional Key Points

Hairstyles

- Students with long hair must wear it tied back, braided and/or pinned

Checking hair for head lice

- **Class or whole school 'head checks'**

School staff and nurses **do not routinely** undertake class head checks for head lice, as this is not an efficient or effective strategy for head lice control. Head lice can move at up to 30 cm per minute. They move rapidly away from searching hands and so an infestation can easily be missed. Most children do not have head lice, so valuable class time is wasted checking such children unnecessarily. In addition, it is the responsibility of individual parents to check their own child's hair for head lice. Screening for head lice is most effectively undertaken by parents combing their child's hair using hair conditioner to slow down the head lice, together with a 'nit' comb.

Treatment options for head lice

Use lotion or spray to treat head lice

You can use medicated lotions and sprays that kill head lice in all types of hair. You can buy these from pharmacies, supermarkets or online.

Head lice should die within a day. Lotions and sprays come with a comb to remove dead lice and eggs.

Some treatments need to be repeated after a week to kill any newly hatched lice. Check the pack to see if they're OK for you or your child and how to use them.

If lotions or sprays don't work, speak to your pharmacist about other treatments.

Some treatments aren't recommended because they're unlikely to work:

- products containing permethrin
- head lice "repellents"
- electric combs for head lice
- tree and plant oil treatments, such as tea tree oil, eucalyptus oil and lavender oil herbal remedies

If you don't want to use chemicals

You can buy a special fine-toothed comb (detection comb) online or from pharmacies to remove head lice and nits.



There will be instructions on the pack to follow, but typically you:

- use the comb on wet or dry hair - although it usually works best on wet hair with conditioner
- comb the whole head of hair, from the roots to the ends
- repeat every few days for 2 weeks

You can't prevent head lice

There's nothing you can do to prevent head lice. You can reduce the risk of lice spreading by avoiding head-to-head contact.

Don't use medicated lotions and sprays to prevent head lice. This can irritate the scalp.

There's no need for children to stay off school, or to wash laundry on a hot wash.

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/head-lice-and-nits/>

Treatment is needed only if you see one or more live lice. Nits (empty eggshells) do not always mean that you are infested with lice. Nits can stick to hair even when lice are gone (for example, after treatment that kills the lice).

Related policies and documents

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following policies and documents:

- Employee Handbook
- Staff Handbook
- Code of Conduct for Employees
- Health Safety Handbook
- Boarding Staff Handbook
- National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools
- ISI Handbook for the Inspection of Schools, Regulatory Requirements
- Teachers' Standards
- Departmental Handbook
- Keeping Children Safe in Education
- Safeguarding Policy
- Medical Policies
- Complaints Policy (Parents)
- Complaints Policy (Pupils)

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