

Headlice are a problem that families can find distressing. It is important to recognise that headlice are much more common in the home and local community than in schools.

Adults are as susceptible to headlice as children and anyone, family, relatives or friends can have headlice; clean or short hair is no protection. Headlice are only passed on by close head to head contact (e.g. during family cuddles). They cannot hop, jump or fly.

School Nurses no longer carry out routine head inspections in schools. It has been shown that such inspections are of no use because:

1. They do not tackle the source of the problem which is outside of school.
2. Checking large numbers of heads is an ineffective method detecting less than 50% of infestations.

* In the past, schools were the only place headlice were checked for. This led to the common misconception that schools were the source of the problem.

Prevention and detection at home by every family is the only way to control headlice.

Prevention and Detection of Headlice

Daily brushing and combing of hair morning and night helps to prevent headlice infestation and should remove any stray lice picked up during the day. Combing can damage the lice.

“Break their legs and they won't lay eggs”

Looking for Lice

A live lice is the only definite sign of an infestation. Lice eggs are dark and glued to the base of the hair at the scalp.

Empty hatched eggshells (nits) are white and grow out with the hair.

If you see either of these check carefully for lice. The shed skins and droppings of lice may also be seen on collars, pillows, etc. as black specks or powder.

If you are worried then lice are most easily detected by regularly combing really wet hair from the roots, preferably with a fine toothcomb, straight after normal shampooing. Lice find it difficult to move in wet hair and cannot get out of the way.

Looking for headlice on a regular basis is the best form of prevention.

The “Wet Combing Method”

If you do find live lice, initially follow the special “wet combing method” using hair conditioner and a fine metal toothcomb to get rid of them (see back page of this leaflet). Remember to check the whole family. In many cases this should prevent the need to use chemical treatment (lotions) to kill the lice.

Further Advice

If the headlice prove to be a more stubborn problem using a headlice lotion may be necessary. Note the advice from your school nurse or health visitor. It is important the correct treatment is used and manufacturers instructions followed carefully.

Usually **2 treatments, 7 days apart are recommended.** This ensures newly hatched lice are killed. Some headlice lotions do not kill the eggs but all eggs hatch within 7 days.