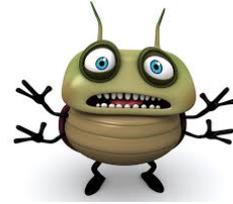


## Once a week, take a peek!



Although the focus of parents and paediatricians is usually on treating head lice infestations, in this day of resistant or hard-to-treat head lice, it is probably even more important to be aware of ways to prevent a head lice infestation.

Head lice are tiny wingless insects that are grey-brown in colour. They are the size of a pinhead when they hatch and 3mm long (the size of a sesame seed) when fully grown.

**Head lice cannot fly, jump or swim.** They are spread by head-to-head contact and climb from the hair of an infected person to the hair of someone else.

Children between 4 to 16 years old are most commonly affected by head lice, although anyone with hair can catch them. Children are often affected by head lice because they tend to have more head-to-head contact while at school or during play

### Useful Tips on avoiding Head Lice

To avoid a head lice infestation, it can help to:

-  Encourage your daughter to avoid sharing things that have been on or near another child's head, including hairbrushes, combs, hats, scarves, towels, helmets, pillows, sleeping bags, etc.
-  Tie your daughters hair back each day for school. As head lice spread through head-to-head contact, and climb from the hair of an infected person to the hair of someone else, the spreading risk can be reduced by tying your daughters hair up every day for school.
-  Other deterrents such as using a tea tree oil based shampoo and conditioner, spraying your daughters head with a children's head lice defence spray or adding a drop of tea tree oil to a water spray, have proven effective.
-  Regularly clean things that your child's head has direct contact with, such as car seats, pillows, head phones, etc., if you are sharing these items with other children.
-  Be extra vigilant for head lice if there have been frequent reports of head lice at your child's school or in your child's classroom.
-  Check your child for nits and live head lice at least once a week, keeping in mind that although you may find head lice anywhere, they are often found at the back of your child's head, near her neck and behind her ears. See 'detecting headlice' below – wet detection method is most effective. Review some head lice pictures to help you understand what you are looking for in your child's hair, including live lice and nits (lice eggs).

⊘ Recognise the symptoms of head lice, which includes an itchy scalp and small red bumps or sores on the back of your child's neck and scalp. If you discover head lice in your child's hair, check the rest of your family, and alert close friends and your child's school. If live head lice are found, take appropriate steps to treat them immediately. Treatment should only be carried out after live head lice have been found. Do not treat hair 'just in case'.

### Life cycle of head lice

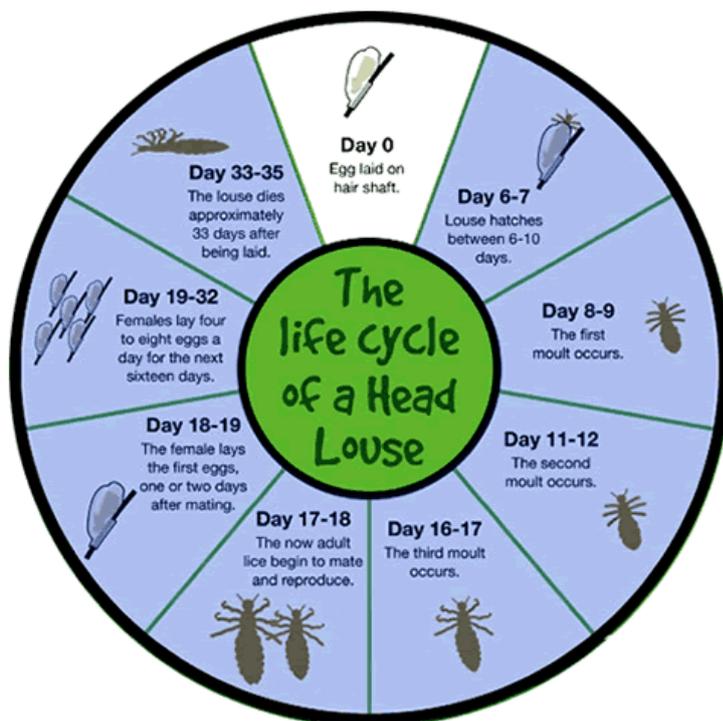
A female head louse lays eggs by cementing them to hairs (often close to the root) where they will be kept warm by the scalp. The eggs are pinhead size and difficult to see.

When the baby lice hatch 7 to 10 days later, the empty eggshells (nits) remain glued in place. Nits glisten white and become more noticeable as the growth of the hair carries them away from the scalp.

Head lice feed by biting the scalp and sucking blood through it. They take 6 to 10 days to become fully grown. Once mature, a head louse can transfer from head to head.

After mating, a female may start to lay eggs as early as the seventh day after she has hatched.

**So to break the life cycle and stop head lice spreading, they need to be removed from the head before the sixth day after hatching.**



### Breaking the life-cycle

*Preventing head lice from spreading:* it is critical to remove the lice before the sixth day from hatching

*Preventing head lice from reproducing:* a new generation of eggs can be laid from day seven after hatching

**Many products rely on killing lice as they hatch because it is difficult to kill live eggs with chemicals, and hard to ensure the removal of all eggs by combing**

With a double dose treatment, applied on day 1 and a week later (day 8) *the three risks are that:*

1. Lice hatch from eggs directly after the first application and reach adulthood before the second application, so they can spread and lay eggs.
2. Lice may continue to hatch till day 11 even after a second application on day 7/8
3. New full-grown lice, caught from other infested heads between applications will lay more eggs.

*If you get your treatment product from a pharmacy, ask the pharmacist to go through the instructions with you. If you buy off-the-shelf, read the information on the pack to find out how many applications per infested head are required.*

**Remember that whatever the product, you *always* have to check for lice on days 5,9 and 12/13 and remove them to avoid the three risks of continuing infestation.**

### **Detecting head lice**

It is very difficult to identify head lice simply by inspecting the head. Detection combing is a more reliable method of finding head lice.

### **Detection combing**

Detection combing can be carried out on dry or wet hair. Less preparation is needed to comb dry hair, but wet combing is more accurate because lice remain motionless when they are wet.

Detection combing involves using a special fine-toothed head lice comb that you can buy from your local pharmacy. The comb has a tooth spacing of less than 0.3mm to trap the smallest lice.

Nit combs are not suitable for louse detection. Combs that are used to remove nits must have teeth that are less than the width of a nit apart. This is too close for detecting head lice because lice that are trapped between the teeth can remain unseen and be combed back onto the head unharmed.

### **Wet detection combing**

For wet detection combing, follow the steps below.

- Wash the hair using ordinary shampoo and apply ample conditioner, before using a wide-toothed comb to straighten and untangle the hair.
- Once the comb moves freely through the hair without dragging, switch to the louse detection comb. Make sure that the teeth of the comb slot into the hair at the roots with the bevel-edge of the teeth lightly touching the scalp.

- Draw the comb down to the ends of the hair with every stroke, and check the comb for lice.
- Remove lice by wiping or rinsing the comb.
- Work methodically through the hair, section by section, so that the whole head of hair is combed through.
- Rinse out the conditioner and repeat the combing procedure in the wet hair.

### **Head lice and school**

There is no need for children with head lice to be kept off school. They will probably have had the infestation for several weeks, so keeping them away from school is unlikely to affect transmission.

Most importantly, remember that children most commonly get head lice through direct head-to-head contact with other children. Watching school-age kids play and interact with each other, you know that can't be eliminated, so concentrate on catching lice infestations early and do what you can to encourage your child to not share objects that touch their heads.