

WHAT ARE HEAD LICE?

They are grey/brown insects, about the size of a match head that live close to the scalp on humans. Unhatched eggs are hard to spot because they are see-through.

WHAT ARE NITS?

Nits are the egg cases left behind when the lice hatch out. They are usually pearly white and very difficult to remove from the hair because they are glued on.

HOW DO LICE SPREAD?

When two heads are touching they can walk along the hair shafts from one head to another. They don't jump or fly and can't get back onto a head from a hat or a comb. If they get cold they can't move very well.

BUT I'VE SEEN THEM JUMP ON THE COMB

This is probably due to static electricity making them 'fly' off the comb.

WHO CAN GET THEM?

Anyone with hair. They aren't fussy about clean or dirty hair. Children tend to get them more than adults probably because they tend to get closer to each other in social situations than adults do.

WHERE DO YOU GET THEM?

Anywhere. Parents often assume children get them at school, especially if they detect them soon after a holiday but they are just as likely to have been caught outside of school.

HOW DO I KNOW IF MY CHILD HAS HEADLICE?

The main symptom is itching but you can have head lice for up to six weeks before you notice any itching. The best way to find them early is to check your child's hair regularly.

HOW DO I DO THAT?

The best way is to do it after hair has been washed. When it is still wet put on some conditioner and comb it through with an ordinary comb. Then, using a detection comb (fine tooth comb) slot the teeth into the hair at the roots and draw the comb down to the ends of the hair. Check the comb for lice every time you do this. Continue until you have checked the whole head paying particular attention to the back of the neck, behind the ears and under the fringe.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD I DO THIS?

It is a good idea to get into a routine and do it about once a week. This means you will be able to treat early if you find them which helps cut down on the number of people who will get head lice.

WHAT DO I DO IF I FIND LICE?

If you find live i.e. **MOVING** lice you should check everyone else in the family and treat all of those who have them. Also let people who have been in close contact with anyone with lice know so they can check as well.

WHAT IF I FIND NITS?

If you find nits but don't find lice, don't treat. Nits will be left behind on the hairs after you have

treated but this doesn't mean the treatment has failed.

WHAT DO I USE TO TREAT THE LICE?

The best way to treat is with a lotion, crème rinse or mousse. These are available on prescription from your GP or over the counter at the pharmacist. Your GP or pharmacist will advise you on which to use.

HOW DO I USE THE LOTION/CRÈME RINSE/MOUSSE?

Treat everyone with lice at the same time so that untreated people don't re-infect the treated ones. There will be instructions on how to apply the preparation, and how long to leave it on for, in the box – each of the preparations is slightly different. The advice in the box is often a bit vague about whether you should use the preparation again but it is advised that the same product is used again 7 days later. The reason for this is that sometimes the treatment doesn't kill the unhatched eggs. The eggs that aren't killed will hatch out within 7 days. So it is a good idea to check everyone's heads after 3-4 days and remove any lice by hand. Then, to be sure to get rid of them, use the treatment again 7 days after the first application. Continue with your weekly checking routine after that.

WHAT IF I KEEP FINDING LICE?

There could be 2 reasons for this. It could be because your child has been re-infected with lice. Check the whole family again and treat all those with lice again. Remember to spread the word to family and friends. Don't use more than three treatments with the same product in three weeks.

If you still find lice after that ask your GP or pharmacist for advice. The other reason is that the lice were not killed. If you followed the instructions correctly then this might be because the lice are resistant to the particular treatment you used. Ask your GP or pharmacist what you should use for the next treatment.

WHAT IF I STILL HAVE NITS?

Nits (empty egg cases) on their own do not need to be treated. You can remove them by hand or fine tooth combing if you don't like the look of them.

BUT MY CHILD IS STILL SCRATCHING.

People can scratch after treatment but it doesn't mean they still have lice. Check your child's head to be sure but only treat if you find live lice. The treatments can make the scalp flaky and itchy. Also some people scratch just thinking or talking about lice.

SHOULD I TREAT 'JUST IN CASE'?

No. The treatments are safe but they shouldn't be over used. They can also make the itching worse.

WHAT IS BUG BUSTING?

Bug Busting is a chemical-free method of treating headlice. It depends on checking hair four times, spaced over two weeks, and combing out lice and nits until they are gone. It is time-consuming and probably not as effective as chemical treatments but it can be useful for some families especially if children are reinfected soon after a chemical treatment. More information and Bug Busting kits (£6.45 incl. P&P) are obtainable from:

Community Hygiene Concern, Manor Gardens Centre, 6-9, Manor Gardens, London N7 6LA or www.chc.org/bugbusting, or email bugbusters2k@yahoo.co.uk. They also run a helpline (0207-6864321). The kits are now available on prescription.

I'VE HEARD TEA TREE OIL IS GOOD FOR KILLING LICE.

There is no evidence that it works and it can irritate your scalp. Nor is there evidence for vodka, electric combs, products sold to prevent reinfection or any other folk remedy.

SHOULDN'T SCHOOL NURSES CHECK CHILDREN'S HEADS?

No. School nurses checking heads has not been shown to stop head lice spreading. They won't be able to identify all children with head lice. It is much better for parents to check their children's heads regularly (about once a week) as described in this leaflet. However, school nurses are available to give help and advice about head lice to parents.

WHAT ABOUT THE SCHOOL – CAN THEY DO ANYTHING?

In the past, schools have sent out 'alert' letters but these tend to cause stress to children and parents and sometimes outbreaks of imaginary lice. It is much better to check your child's head regularly.

SHOULD I KEEP MY CHILD OFF SCHOOL?

NO! Lice are unpleasant and people sometimes feel embarrassed if they get them but they are not a health hazard. There is no reason for your child

to miss out on their education just because of head lice. Keep alert and spread the word to stop the spread of lice.

Produced by: Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS), Castle Buildings, Stormont, Belfast BT4 3SJ, on behalf of the Health and Social Services Boards.

email: health.protection@dhsspsni.gov.uk

Telephone: (028) 90520083

www.dhsspsni.gov.uk

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HEAD LICE – YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED