

However, school nurses / nursery managers should discuss with the Infection Prevention and Control team regarding the requirement to notify other parents to remain vigilant for head lice.

Close contacts of patients living in the same house are usually checked and treated if they have head lice.

Treatments are available from local pharmacies – please discuss with the Pharmacist.

For more information about **Head Lice** contact:

Health Protection Nurse or Infection Prevention and Control Team  
Princess Elizabeth Hospital

Direct Line: 707420

Switchboard: 725241  
Ext No: 4588 or 4220

# Head Lice & Nits



**INFORMATION LEAFLET**

### **What are head lice (Pediculosis)?**

Head lice are parasitic insects called pediculus humanus capitis. They only live on the heads of people. There are three forms of head lice:

**Nits** are head lice eggs. The oval, yellowy white eggs are hard to see and may be confused with dandruff. They attach themselves to the hair shaft and take about a week to hatch. The eggs remain after hatching and many nits are empty egg cases.

**Nymphs** hatch from the nits. The baby lice look like adults, but are smaller. They take about 7 days to mature to adults and feed on blood to survive.

**Adults** are about the size of a sesame seed. They have six legs and are tan to grayish white in colour. The legs have hook-like claws to hold onto the hair with. Adults can live up to 30 days and feed on blood. Head lice cannot jump, hop or swim.

### **Who catches head lice?**

Anyone can catch head lice, but pre-school children, primary school children and their families are most at risk.

### **How do you catch head lice?**

Head lice are transmitted through direct, prolonged head-to-head contact with an infected person. This is especially common during play or sport at school and with close contacts at home.

Transmission is possible through infected clothes, combs, brushes or towels, but extremely unlikely. The lifespan of a louse is very short once detached from the hair.

### **How do you know if you have head lice?**

The head lice are most commonly found behind the ears and at the back of the neck. It is rare to find them on the body, eye lashes or eyebrows.

A person with head lice may feel a tickling or itching feeling of something moving in the hair. Most people only realize they have head lice after the itch has developed which can take from one week to 2-3 months after

initial infection. Itching may also occur due to an allergic reaction to the bites. Sores can develop due to scratching and can then become infected.

### **How do you treat someone with head lice?**

A diagnosis of head lice can only be made if a living, moving louse is found.

Detection combing following the following process is the best method of diagnosis:

You will need – **A Plastic Detector Comb** (these are available from your pharmacist – ask for help if there are none on display).

1. Wash the hair well and towel until damp, but not dripping.
2. Ensure that there is good lighting – daylight is best.
3. First, comb the hair with an ordinary comb. Then, using the detector comb, begin at the top of the head, making sure that the comb is touching the scalp; slowly draw the comb towards the ends of the hair (applying a small quantity of hair conditioner may assist with this).
4. Check the teeth of the comb carefully.
5. Repeat steps (3) and (4), working your way around the head from the top of the scalp to the ends of the hair. This should take 10 to 15 minutes.
6. If there are head lice, you will find one or more on the teeth of the comb.
7. If you find lice, or something which you are unsure about, stick it on to a piece of paper with clear sticky tape and take it to your GP or local pharmacist.

**The best way to stop Head Lice infection is to do detection combing regularly. NEVER use insecticidal liquids or lotions to PREVENT infection, or “just in case”.**

### **Should my child be excluded from school / nursery if they have head lice?**

No. It is not necessary to exclude an infected child from school or nursery, as they will have been at school / nursery for several weeks before the diagnosis.