

INFORMATION LEAFLET FOR PARENT/CARERS

FACTS ABOUT HEAD LICE

- Head lice are small insects which are usually found close to the scalp where there is warmth, food and shelter from detection.
- They cannot fly, jump or hop and are spread where heads touch each other.
- Head lice are very common and affect most children some time in their life.
- Most head lice infections are not caught in school.

HOW CAN I PREVENT/DETECT/TREAT HEAD LICE?

1. PREVENTION

Children should have their own comb and be taught how to use it. Combing hair at least twice a day and regular shampooing and conditioning will help to prevent any head lice infection becoming established.

2. DETECTION

- ♦ Shampoo hair and apply plenty of conditioner to make the hair wet and slippery.
- ♦ Comb the hair from the scalp outwards, section by section, with a fine plastic tooth comb (a detector comb, available from chemists) for at least 10 minutes over a sink, bath tub or disposable towel. If lice are present they will fall out or stick to the comb. Please note that medical advice suggests that if there are no moving head lice, the child is not considered to have head lice.
- ♦ The comb should be washed with water or wiped clean with a paper napkin between each stroke.
- ♦ Repeat this method as often as required, e.g. at routine hair washing sessions.

HEAD LICE GUIDANCE

For all educational establishments

3. TREATMENT

Wet-combing method

It is recommended that this is a safe and effective way of treating head lice and should be used first before considering the use of insecticide lotions.

- ◆ This method of treatment should be carried out every 3–4 days over a 2 week period (a total of 4 sessions over 2 weeks).
- ◆ The principles of this method (sometimes called the 'bug-busting' method) are: WASH, RINSE, CONDITION AND COMB.
- ◆ This method is as follows:
 1. Wash the hair with ordinary shampoo.
 2. Put ordinary conditioner on the hair.
 3. Then either sitting upright or bowed over a sink, whichever is most comfortable, comb the hair with a wide-toothed comb to straighten and untangle the hair.
 4. Untangle the hair using a close toothed plastic comb or lice detector comb purchased from the local pharmacies.
 5. Slot teeth into a section of hair, right at the roots, touching the scalp gently.
 6. Check the comb for lice between each stroke. Remove lice by wiping the comb on kitchen paper. The lice caught between the teeth should be removed with a cocktail stick or nailbrush.
 7. Work all over the head, section by section, combing and cleaning until the comb comes through louse free.
 8. Rinse the hair, leave the hair dripping wet. Use a wide toothed comb to straighten and untangle the hair again.
 9. Keeping the hair wet, use the lice detector comb to comb the rinsed hair. Work all over the head until the comb comes through louse free. Once it is known that one member of the family has lice, the whole family should use this method to see if they have head lice.

Treatment with Insecticide Lotions/Rinses

- ◆ Insecticides are used when the wet combing method is not thought to be effective.
- ◆ Insecticides should only be used if live lice have been found in the hair – it should not be used to prevent head lice, only to treat the condition.
- ◆ The table below lists the advantages and disadvantages of using insecticides lotions.

| ADVANTAGES | DISADVANTAGES |
|---|--|
| <p>A quick and easy method of treatment.</p> <p>Evidence available indicates that this method of treatment is successful.</p> | <p>Alcoholic preparations may induce an allergic reaction.</p> <p>A more expensive method than wet combing.</p> <p>Inappropriate repetitive use can lead to resistance to further head lice infections.</p> <p>A dislike of using a pesticide to treat head lice.</p> <p>Insecticides need to be used with caution:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in pregnant women and nursing mothers; • in infants under 6 months old; • on a repetitive basis. <p>Can cause skin irritation if used repeatedly.</p> <p>Can affect coloured, permed or bleached hair.</p> |

- ◆ Insecticides are available from a pharmacy, without a prescription. It is important that instructions on use are followed carefully. After treatment, the wet-combing method should be used to check for head lice and to remove dead eggs.
- ◆ A second application is recommended seven days after the first one, but if the lice appear to be unaffected by the product (some lice may have developed resistance to a particular insecticide) or if the problem persists, you should seek advice from your GP, who can advise you on further treatments which may be only available on prescription.
- ◆ It should be noted that chlorine may lessen the effect of some insecticides – and it is recommended that if the child has been swimming in a chlorinated pool in the 72 hours before treatment the hair should be washed and dried before lotion is applied. Swimming should not be banned after treatment.

NB PLEASE NOTE THAT HEAD LICE SHAMPOOS ARE CONSIDERED TO BE INEFFECTIVE IN THE TREATMENT OF HEAD LICE.

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Alternative Therapies

The following advice has been provided by Birmingham Health Authority's Consultant in Communicable Disease Control:

- ◆ Over recent years there has been an increase in interest in using naturally occurring substances to treat head lice, e.g. tea tree oil, other essential oils, herbal remedies, petrol and paraffin.
- ◆ There is no evidence to suggest the efficacy of these treatments and no standards exist to regulate their use.
- ◆ Over-use of essential oils in unskilled hands can be hazardous, and some substances, e.g. paraffin and petrol are potentially dangerous.
- ◆ Head coverings, e.g. baseball caps and scarves do not prevent the transmission of lice.
- ◆ A spray intended for use as head lice prevention is available from chemists. The technique rather difficult and does not have a long lasting effect. This product can prove to be very costly and is not available on prescription.
- ◆ An electric detector comb is also very expensive and no evidence is available as to how effective it is as a treatment.

PLEASE REMEMBER TO LET YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL OR NURSERY KNOW THAT YOU HAVE FOUND HEAD LICE AND HAVE UNDERTAKEN THE APPROPRIATE TREATMENT.

REMEMBER REGULAR SHAMPOOING, AND CONDITIONING AND DAILY COMBING OF HAIR WILL REDUCE THE CHANCES OF HEAD LICE BEING FOUND IN CHILD'S HEAD.