

## Option 2: Lotions and liquids

Do not use unless you find a live head louse. Ask for advice from your local pharmacist, health visitor or school nurse.

Insecticide lotions (alcohol based) are recommended for the treatment of head lice.

Insecticide liquids (water based) are recommended for people with asthma, eczema or broken skin and for young children.

Silicon solvent (dimeticone) works by coating the lice and stopping them from moving. It is likely to be less irritant than other chemical treatments and it is not absorbed through the skin.

Please note that treatments can be inactivated by chlorine from swimming pools and heat from hair dryers and the sun.

### Can head lice be prevented?

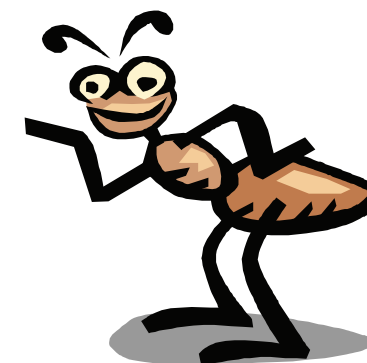
There is no way of preventing head lice. Lice repellent sprays are not very effective. Regular detection combing of children's hair will identify an infection early. This means treatment can be started early, which means less chance of passing lice to others.

## Some other points about head lice

- Do not use anti-lice lotions to in an attempt to prevent head lice or 'just in case'. This is because unnecessary use of insecticidal/ chemical agents may cause lice to become resistant to them.
- A common reason for head lice to recur in one person is because close contacts (family and friends) are not checked to see if they also have head lice. The treated person is then likely to get head lice back again from untreated family or friends.
- After treatment it may take 2 to 3 weeks for the itch if present to go fully.
- Your GP has been asked not to prescribe lotions and liquids because these products are cheap to buy and readily available from pharmacies, including supermarket pharmacies.
- All recommended insecticides kill adult lice but do not reliably kill eggs.
- There is little evidence to support the use of herbal products such as tea tree oil.

# Head lice

This leaflet explains how to detect and treat head lice



## What are head lice and nits?

Head lice are tiny grey/brown insects. Head lice are about the size of a sesame seed when full grown. They cling to hairs, but stay close to the scalp where there is food and warmth. They lay eggs which hatch into new lice after 7 to 10 days.

Nits are the white empty egg shells which are left when the lice hatch. Nits can look like dandruff, but stick strongly to hair. Unlike dandruff, nits cannot be brushed out easily.

## Who gets head lice?

Head lice are common in children, but can affect anyone at any age. They are not a sign of dirty hair or poor hygiene. Close 'head to head' contact is usually needed to pass lice on. Head lice cannot jump or fly, but walk from one head to another. When away from hair they soon die, and do not live in clothes, bedding etc. Most head lice infections are caught from family or close friends who are not aware that they have head lice.

## How can you tell if you have head lice?

An itchy scalp is common but many infected people have no symptoms and still pass lice on to others. Head lice are difficult to find just by looking in the hair.

## How to check for head lice (Detection Combing)

Detection combing (described below) is the best way to tell if you have head lice. The time taken to do this depends on the length and thickness of the hair. You should repeat the combing technique once a week.

- Wash the hair as normal with ordinary shampoo.
- Rinse out the shampoo and put on ordinary conditioner.
- Comb the hair with a normal comb to get rid of tangles.
- When the hair is untangled, switch to a detection comb. This is a special fine toothed comb that can be bought from your local pharmacy. The teeth of normal combs are too far apart.
- Slot the teeth of the detection comb into the hair at the roots so it is touching the scalp.
- Draw the detection comb through to the tips of the hair.
- Check the comb for lice after each stroke.
- If you see any lice, clean the comb by wiping it on a tissue or rinse it before the next stroke.

- Repeat this in all directions until you have combed all the hair.
- Rinse out the conditioner.
- Repeat the detection combing technique in the rinsed hair to check for any lice that you might have missed the first time.

## Treatment

If you find a head louse choose one of the following treatment options.

### Option 1: Wet combing/'bug busting'

This aims at systematic removal of live lice by combing through the hair and physically removing any lice found.

- Follow the detection combing method outlined above and repeat on days 5, 9 and 13 for at least 2 weeks. This will remove any lice that have hatched from eggs left in the hair.
- If you find any fully-grown adults during this time, head lice have been caught again. You must carry on for at least another 2 weeks.

For pregnant and breast feeding women and infants under 6 months old this is the recommended option.

