

Guidelines regarding Head Lice (*Pediculus capitis*)

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| <i>Transmission:</i> | Close contact with an infected person. |
| <i>Incubation period:</i> | The eggs usually hatch in 7 to 10 days. Once hatched the lice are capable of laying eggs in 10 days. |
| <i>Period of Communicability:</i> | Until lice and nits (eggs) are destroyed. |
| <i>Exclusion:</i> | Exclude until treatment has commenced. |
| <i>Note:</i> | Head lice infestation does not transmit disease. |

For more advice contact child health nurse.

Head lice can be found on the cleanest of hair - anyone can catch head lice.

Below are some possible treatments for Head Lice:

Hair Conditioner Treatment

Head lice can be more easily removed by applying conditioner to the hair and combing to remove lice and eggs (nits). As well as making combing easier, the conditioner works by slowing down the head lice for about twenty minutes, so that it is easier to trap the lice in the comb.

To remove lice:

- Apply plenty of hair conditioner to the dry hair, leave for 10 minutes to 'set' and then comb through with an ordinary brush / comb to remove tangles.
- Comb hair thoroughly with a metal nit comb in 4 directions - forwards, backwards, to the left, to the right.
- Wipe the comb onto a white paper towel to check that the dark coloured adult lice or pale coloured hatchlings are being removed. Hatchlings may emerge from any missed eggs. You may need to use a good magnifying glass to see the lice.
- Rinse conditioner off and dry the hair.
- Repeat this process daily for the 21 days of the head lice life cycle.
- Repeat this process weekly after head lice have been eliminated if you want to check for and prevent re-infestation.

To remove eggs:

Some eggs will be removed by combing, but others will be harder to detach. You will need to use your fingernails or tweezers to remove as many eggs as possible from the base of the hair shaft - remember only those within 1 cm of the scalp will hatch. Those further along the hair shaft will be already hatched or dead.

Note:

- After combing, soak the brush / comb in hot soapy water to kill any trapped eggs or lice.
- Any type of hair conditioner may be used.

Olive Oil Treatment

The olive oil treatment is a safe and effective way to kill head lice. Olive oil, or cooking oil, smothers and kills adult head lice and makes them easier to comb out. The oil also makes it easier to comb out the eggs (nits) which are glued to the hair shafts near the scalp. Regardless of the treatment used, daily inspection for and removal of eggs for 3 weeks is necessary to prevent reinfestation.

To kill the lice which may hatch from remaining eggs the oil should be applied according to the following schedule: Days 1, 2, 5, 9, 13, 17 and 21. The treatment days coincide with the life cycle of the louse. You may do the treatments more often if you like, but try not to miss any of these days.

This treatment can also be started with an insecticide, which should be washed out before applying the oil. In this case, day 2 can be omitted from the schedule.

Apply Oil to the Hair

Apply enough oil to the hair to coat all of it thoroughly. Be generous! Leave on for at least 8 hours or overnight.

Comb Out the Nits

The next day, comb out any dead lice and eggs with a nit comb. Layer the hair into sections and carefully comb the entire scalp. After combing, wash out the oil with regular shampoo.

Check for Nits

Check dry hair under a bright light for any eggs you may have missed.

Clean the Environment

Head lice cannot survive for long away from the scalp (1 to 2 days). Regular washing of bed linen and brushes and combs in hot soapy water will kill any remaining lice. Hats and caps can either be washed in hot soapy water or left for 1 week in order to give any attached lice time to die.

Other Treatments

There are a number of head lice treatments available from Pharmacists. The Health Department recommends that all treatment options be discussed with local Pharmacists, to encourage co-ordinated community control. Insecticidal treatments contain chemicals which may not be suitable for everyone. In the following cases, a Doctor or Pharmacist should definitely be consulted before insecticides are used:

- Babies under the age of six months.
- Asthmatics or people suffering from a scalp condition.
- Pregnant or breastfeeding women.

There are a number of alternative products on the market, such as tea-tree oil and sassafras oil. These have varying degrees of effectiveness. Further advice on these products is available from Pharmacists. All preparations are capable of causing some irritation, particularly if overused.

Prevention Check List

- L - Look in school-age children's hair weekly
- I - If you find head lice commence treatment immediately
- C - Comb and brush hair twice a day, and tie long hair back
- E - Educate your family and friends.

A more detailed pamphlet on Head Lice, by the Health Department of Western Australia, is available from the school office.