

Head lice **FACTS**

Headlice are a common problem all over the world. They are small, flat insects about 2–3 mm long that breed all year round.

Headlice:

- live on the human scalp – which provides food and warmth for their eggs to hatch
- feed on human blood through the scalp 5 or 6 times a day
- cannot jump, fly or swim
- do not carry disease
- remain on the head after swimming or bathing/showering.

Headlice may cause itching but do not usually cause disease. Occasionally scalp infections requiring treatment may develop.

Life **cycle**

Female lice lay about 7–10 eggs each night. Eggs are laid close to the scalp. Each egg is firmly glued to a hair.

The eggs (nits) are small and hard (like a grain of salt) and are normally pale grey in colour. After hatching, the nits (empty egg cases) are white.

Eggs hatch in 9 days, and a louse will live for 40 days.

Head lice are sometimes given other names like 'nits', 'kutis', 'kutu bugs' or 'head louse'.

Looking **FOR** HEAD LICE

In school age children, check for head lice regularly once a week.

Look over the scalp for insects or eggs, especially:

- around the hairline at the back of the neck
- behind the ears
- on the crown.

Use a fine-tooth comb on wet hair to find lice. Scratch marks or a rash can be a sign that your child has headlice. Not all children complain of itchy heads.

Eggs are laid next to the scalp and hair grows about 1 cm a month. Therefore any eggs found more than 1 cm from the scalp will have hatched and died. You can remove these eggs. You do not need to treat again if treatment is completed.

When **TO** TREAT

- If you find a LIVE insect on the scalp
- If you find eggs within 1 cm of the scalp.

How **TO** TREAT

Speak to your pharmacist, doctor, or practice nurse for advice about what treatment to use and how to use it.

You need a special shampoo or lotion (containing insecticide) available only from your pharmacist or doctor to kill both the insects and eggs.

Always follow the manufacturer's recommendations supplied with individual treatments. Some treatments are used twice, 7–10 days apart.

After using shampoo, dead eggs are left. Treatments and combs will not remove dead eggs. The eggs can each be removed between finger and thumb. Vinegar may help to loosen the glue the eggs are held on with but will not kill them. Recheck your children's heads after a week and make sure they brush their hair every night.

Wet combing may be effective if done properly. Some herbal treatments and remedies may be effective. Talk to the pharmacist, your doctor or public health nurse for advice.

What **DOES** **NOT** WORK

Ordinary shampoo or soap will not kill head lice.

DO **NOT** Use

Do not use flyspray, kerosene or animal remedies because these can be dangerous for children.

