

HEAD LICE ... The Facts



What are head lice and nits?

Head lice are tiny insects which lay eggs that hatch after 7-10 days. It takes about 10 days for a newly hatched louse to grow to an adult and start to lay eggs. Nits are the empty white eggshells that are left when the lice hatch. Nits look like dandruff, but stick strongly to hair. Unlike dandruff, you cannot easily brush out nits.

How can you tell if you have head lice?

This is done by using a detector comb available from your local Pharmacy. Check the base of hairs for eggs and comb the hair over a piece of white paper to see if you can spot any dark mature lice. Start with the teeth of the comb touching the scalp and draw carefully over the length of the hair before tapping over the white paper. Rinse or wipe the comb between each stroke. Remember! Combing works best on damp (not wet hair). The hairs behind the ears and at the nape of the neck are favourite spots so lice and eggs may be spotted here. Lice are small insects with moving legs or may appear like small specks of dirt/dust in the comb or on the paper. If lice are spotted treat as recommended. An itchy scalp occurs in some cases. If this occurs it is due to an allergy to lice and not to the lice biting on the scalp. Many affected people have no symptoms, but can still be infested and pass on lice to others.

Remember!

Head lice are transferred by close hair-to-hair contact. They cannot jump, fly or swim, but walk from one hair to another. It is possible to pass a louse from one head to another if a hat or bed is shared, but this is very unlikely and contamination almost always occurs from close head to head contact. Treatment of the heads of family members should resolve the situation without necessity for further actions.

Treatments!

Treatment is needed only if you see one or more live lice. Nits (empty eggshells) do not always mean that you are infested with lice. Nits can stick to hair even when lice are gone. (for example, after treatment that kills the lice).

Options:

Bug busting kit (this uses a series of very fine-toothed plastic combs to systematically remove lice and nits from your child's hair) Pesticides (there are many brands available from local pharmacies all with varying treatment regimens). Non pesticide treatments which smother the lice and nits. (always speak to your local pharmacist to find the best option for your family, and to comply with local treatment regimes to avoid resistance building up to given products).

What to do?

Once head lice have been detected the normal advice is to treat once, and repeat seven days later. This ensures that any eggs that weren't killed in the initial treatment will be killed off.

Important!

You MUST check your child's head regularly to ensure they don't have them, even if they are NOT showing any signs. During an outbreak checking should occur every two to three days. The best way to eradicate lice in a population (e.g. a school) is for all the population to check for lice on a given day – treat anyone affected and then recheck the full population after 3 days. At this stage again treat any affected persons and repeat all treatments required after 7 days to catch any unhatched eggs. In conjunction with regular combing & checking, this should enable the population to eliminate any infestation.

(One weeks concerted effort by everyone can solve the problem for everyone in the affected community).
Checking & combing is most important even AFTER a treatment has been used.

Why?

This is because treatment is not protection against re-infestation. A combined effort of treating followed by regular checking will stop lice being passed around again. Re-infestation normally occurs due to cross contamination rather than treatment not working. It's a good idea to wash any hats or pillow cases but there is no need to wash clothing. Any lice found away from the scalp are likely to be damaged or dead.

Prevention!

Regular checking is the most important means of preventing the spread of lice in a population. Some sprays and shampoos are also available from local pharmacies which may make hair less attractive for lice and which may help prevent infestation in some cases.

Remember!

Your local Pharmacist is always on hand to offer further advice on treatment or on the best way to eliminate a resistant outbreak.

For further information call into any local Pharmacy or contact us on the telephone numbers below:

Healthwise Bunbeg: 074 9531254
Healthwise Buncrana: 074 9362412
Healthwise Dungloe: 074 9522255
Healthwise Ballybofey: 074 9131046
Healthwise Lifford: 074 9141030
Healthwise Newtown: 074 9156929
Healthwise Sligo: 071 9138016
Healthwise Ballinasloe: 090 9642148
Healthwise Poolboy: 090 9645693
Healthwise Oranmore: 091 794607

Letterkenny

Healthwise Ballyraine: 074 9106444
Healthwise Glencar: 074 9168666

Moville

Healthwise Hannons: 074 9382929
Healthwise Foyle: 074 9382929