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| Head lice |
| Frequently asked questions |
| OFFICIAL |

#### Where do head lice come from?

Head lice have been around for thousands of years. As with any insect, they learn to adapt to their environment in order to survive. They do not live on any other part of the body or on any other animal. We are never going to be completely rid of them, but we can make managing them easier.

#### Do head lice fly or jump?

Head lice do not have wings so they cannot fly. They can't jump because they do not have knees.

#### So how do head lice move around?

Head lice crawl very fast and require head-to-head contact to be transferred from one person to another. It is probably because of the way young children play, head lice are seen more widely amongst primary school children than adolescents or adults.

#### Can head lice spread disease?

No. Head lice cannot transmit or pass diseases on to people. Constant scratching may lead to sores on the scalp, however this is very rare.

#### Who is responsible for checking and treating head lice?

Like similar health conditions such as scabies or ringworm, it is a parent or guardian’s responsibility to treat and care for their child.

#### Do head lice live in carpets, clothes, hats or sheets?

No. Head lice very rarely fall from the head. They require blood to survive. Head lice feed three to four times a day and without blood, will dehydrate in six hours in a dry climate and 24 hours in a humid climate.

An egg requires warmth to hatch and is the reason why they are laid close to the scalp. The further away from the scalp, the less likely they are to survive.

#### Is it true that head lice only like clean hair?

No. Head lice are not selective. They don't care if hair is long, short, blonde, brown, washed this morning or last week. As long as they are warm, and have blood to drink, then they are content.

#### What treatment kills 100% of head lice or eggs?

There is no single treatment that kills 100% of head lice or eggs. Whichever treatment you choose it can take time and persistence to get rid of head lice. Use a method that will not risk the health of your child.

#### Is there a way to prevent head lice?

No. It's important to check your child's head regularly with conditioner and comb even when you don’t think your child has head lice. There is no research to prove that chemical or herbal therapies can prevent head lice.

#### How does the conditioner and comb method work?

Hair conditioner does not kill lice, but it does stun them for about 20 minutes, meaning they do not move around, and it is difficult for them to hang on. This gives you time to comb through the hair with a fine tooth (head lice) comb. This method can be used to both find head lice or ‘treat’ them.

#### How does a chemical treatment work?

Only use products that are licensed or registered for treating head lice. There are four different active chemicals that target head lice, each works differently and aims to kill lice and/or eggs. Always make sure you follow the instructions for the product and repeat the application as advised, usually seven days after the first treatment.

#### Do some products work better than others?

Over time, head lice may develop resistance to some chemicals. It is important to check if a treatment you used has worked, and if not, treat again with another product that has a different chemical in it or use the conditioner and comb method (the same method used to find head lice).

#### Why do you have to treat again in seven days’ time?

Head lice eggs take six to seven days to hatch. Not all head lice treatment products or methods kill both lice and eggs at the same time. By treating again in seven days, you are aiming to kill and comb out any head lice that have since hatched from eggs, which were missed during the first treatment.

#### Should I treat everyone in the family?

It is important to check each family member, using conditioner and comb, for head lice but only treat those with live lice.

#### What should I wash or treat at home?

As head lice only live for a short time off the head, the only extra cleaning needed is to wash the pillowslip on the hot cycle or place in a clothes dryer. Head lice combs can be cleaned in water hotter than 60 degrees.

#### Why does my child keep getting re-infested?

Re-infestation is the least likely reason for head lice returning in a week's time. If eggs do not die or were not removed during the original treatment they may hatch, and the lifecycle starts all over again. To break this lifecycle, you must re-treat (regardless of treatment method) seven days after the first treatment and continue with weekly checking.

#### Does my child have to miss school?

According to the Public Health and Wellbeing Regulations 2019, children with head lice can be readmitted to school after head lice treatment has commenced. If your child is found to have head lice while at school, they should be provided with a note to take home at the end of the day advising you that they have head lice and should be treated before they return to school the next day. A certificate from a doctor or council is not required before your child goes back to school.

#### Where can I find out more information?

You can find more information about head lice and how to treat them at the following websites:

* The [Department of Health](https://www.health.vic.gov.au/infectious-diseases/head-lice) <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/infectious-diseases/head-lice>
* [Better Health Channel](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/head-lice-nits) <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/head-lice-nits>
* The [Department of Education](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/head-lice/policy) <https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/head-lice/policy>

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| Helpful hints* Using the conditioner and comb method every week is the best way to detect head lice early and minimise the problem.
* Tying back hair and not sharing hairbrushes or hats can help prevent the spread of head lice.
* Parents may complain that they are doing the right thing, but other parents aren’t. Placing the blame on others will not achieve anything. The best way to overcome head lice problems in a school setting is for everyone to work together and help each other.
* The department’s head lice management strategy is supported by the Department of Education. The Department of Education policy and other resources can be found on their [website](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/head-lice/policy) <https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/head-lice/policy>.
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| Treatment choices* **Chemical:** Treat and comb to remove the head lice and eggs; and repeat in seven days.
* **Non-chemical:** Use conditioner and comb to remove the head lice and eggs; and repeat every two days until no live lice have been found for 10 days.
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