

Management of Head Lice Policy – 2023



Head lice are rarely a threat to health but their presence can have social, economic, psychological and educational repercussions. Children with head lice may not attend the St. Martini Kindergarten and Pre-Primary school for as long as they are infected.

Key Facts about Head Lice¹

The facts are that head lice:

1. Do NOT jump. Their legs are designed for climbing, not jumping.
2. Do NOT swim;
3. Do NOT infest only people who do not regularly wash. They feed on blood not dirt;
4. Do NOT prefer one hair colour or hair type;
5. Do NOT prefer one blood group over another;
6. Do NOT live in carpets or on animals. They only live on human heads.
7. Head lice eggs and adult lice can only survive 1-2 days without the right temperature, humidity and a blood food source.

Definitions

1. Louse: (the singular form of 'lice') is a small (2-3 mm long) wingless insect
2. Nit: is the egg of the louse.
3. Nymph: the juvenile form of the louse, intermediate between the egg and the sexually mature adult
4. Ovicidal activity: is able to kill eggs as well as nymphs and adult head lice
5. Pediculicide: a chemical used to kill head lice and eggs
6. Resistance: ability of head lice or eggs to survive a dose of pediculicide which would usually be considered lethal.

Life cycle of the head louse (*Pediculus humanus capitis*):

1. The head louse starts out as a small egg about the size of a grain of salt (approx. 0.8 mm) which the female glues to the hair shaft right at the base and often touching the scalp.
2. The eggs are hard, yellow-white and non-transparent giving a gritty feel when running one's fingers through the hair. They are most often found in the hair behind the ears, but can also be found at the nape of the neck, around the crown and under fringes.
3. They are easily seen in the sun or in other bright light.

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<https://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/public+content/sa+health+internet/protecting+public+health/public+health+pest+management/head+lice%2C+management+guidelines+for+schools>

4. Eggs take about 7-10 days to hatch and will only hatch if they are on a person's head. Therefore, eggs are unlikely to hatch if they are on hair that has fallen out onto the floor or bedding, or if attached to hair which has come out in a brush.
5. When the eggs hatch, the egg shells become shiny, translucent and flat. They still remain firmly glued to the hair shaft, and can only be removed by picking off with fingernails or with a fine toothed comb. Head lice have piercing mouthparts which they use to suck blood from the scalp in much the same way that mosquitoes do.
6. The newly hatched head louse (nymph) immediately seeks a blood meal and needs about six meals a day.
7. The saliva of the headlouse contains an anaesthetic, so the bite is usually painless. **It is only several weeks after the first infestation that the bite becomes itchy.** Not everyone gets itchy.
8. The nymph sheds its skin three times to grow during the two weeks it takes to reach adulthood. The discarded skins are often to be found on the pillow together with the black sandy excrement of the head lice and are sometimes the first clue to their presence.
9. The adult head lice, like the eggs, can only survive at a certain temperature in the humid environment of the scalp with a food supply (blood) nearby. Therefore they are unlikely to stray far from the scalp and hair.
10. If head lice fall off or accidentally crawl onto towels, brushes, hats or clothing that have been in contact with the hair, they are most likely unwell or injured, and even if healthy they are unable to survive for more than a day or two away from the scalp.
11. At the next stage of their life cycle, the adult head lice mate and each female proceeds to lay eggs and glue them to the hair shaft right at the base and often touching the scalp, thus continuing the infestation. Each adult female lays 150-300 eggs in her lifespan of three weeks or so.

Modes Of Transmission

1. The usual way in which a person gets head lice is from direct hair-to-hair contact with another person.
2. Such contact is likely amongst children playing, or in children or adults hugging. Therefore, contact with household members, friends and classmates is the most common means of transmission in our society.
3. While head lice don't jump, they can crawl. Therefore, the children are discouraged from sharing caps and hats.

Epidemiology - who is likely to be affected, when and where?

1. Evidence indicates that head lice infestations are received throughout the year with a reduction in the cooler months.
2. Head lice can infest a person of any age, sex, race and socioeconomic status, but the hosts are most frequently children.

Disease transmission

Bites are only a problem when the skin is scratched because of itching, and these scratches then become infected. The best way to minimise this is to avoid scratching, but if scratches do become infected, treatment with antibiotics may be required and a doctor should be consulted.

Treatment

1. Electrical combs.
2. Enzyme treatments.
3. Treating with chemical pediculicides and non-chemical wet-combing:
 - a. The chemical treatment uses pediculicides which can kill the head lice and some nits, whereas the wet-combing treatment involves saturating the hair and scalp with hair conditioner to stun the lice and then combing the head lice and nits out.
 - b. Both methods are effective but it is recommended, especially in heavy infestations, to use both chemical treatment and the wet-combing treatment.
 - c. The wet-combing method should be avoided for at least one day before and after using a chemical treatment.

Managing an Outbreak of Head Lice

1. Head lice checks are the responsibility of the family.
2. However, physical lice checks will be carried out by the class teachers and / or a delousing professional, if there is an established outbreak affecting more than 3 children in a class. It is compulsory that all children be checked and that the cost of any check by a professional may have to be borne by the parents.
3. If staff detect or suspect that a child has head lice they will do the following:
 - a. Remove the child from direct head to head contact with others.
 - b. The child does not need to be isolated but must be discouraged from head-to-head contact with others.
 - c. The parents will be telephoned to collect the child as soon as possible and no later than the end of the normal school day (12:30).
4. The teacher or teaching assistant will meet the parent when they arrive to collect the child:
 - a. Reassure the parent that lice are not an indication of poor hygiene; lice don't mind who they choose to infest.
 - b. Advise the parent about treatment methods.
5. The child may return to school when he/she is free of nits (eggs) and lice.
6. By repeated infestation, the school has the right to insist that the child receive professional treatment.
7. By treatment after a repeated infestation or ineffective first time treatment, a note from a professional (delousing professional, chemist, etc.) confirming that the child is nit and lice free must be produced and handed in at the office when the child returns to school.

Treating The Environment After The Incidence Of Head Lice

1. Combs and brushes are washed in hot water.
2. Bed linen and pillow cases are washed and can be dried in a clothes dryer or ironed.
3. If an item is difficult to wash, it will be sealed in a plastic bag for three or four days.
4. Carpets are vacuumed as a precautionary measure.
5. Children are discouraged from sharing helmets, hats, caps or hairbrushes.