

The prevention and treatment of head lice

Detection:

Head lice are well camouflaged and hide when disturbed by combing. They do not always cause itching, particularly when recently arrived on the head. They may also be few in number and a quick inspection is unlikely to detect them. The following method of detection is effective:

- Wash the hair using ordinary shampoo, then use a wide toothed comb to straighten and untangle the hair, and using hair conditioner.
- Once the comb moves freely through the hair, without dragging, switch to a fine tooth comb. Make sure the teeth of the comb slot into the hair at the roots and draw down to the ends of the hair with every stroke. The comb must be fine enough to catch the lice – do not confuse lice or their eggs with clumps of dandruff or other debris.
- Check the comb for lice after each stroke as you work through the hair section by section, so that the whole head of hair is combed through, then rinse out the conditioner and repeat the combing procedure in the wet hair.
- This can be undertaken on a regular basis e.g. at routine hair washing sessions to detect the presence of lice before they can spread. Check all family members at the same time and arrange treatment when lice are found.

Treatments:

If you find lice, then there are two options. Whichever option you choose it is important to recognise that neither will protect against re-infection if head to head contact is made with someone with head lice at a later date. You may therefore wish to undertake occasional checks during hair washing sessions.

Option 1: Lotions

- Do not use lotions unless you find a living moving louse. Check all close family/friends by the “wet combing” method, as described, and treat anyone who is found to have lice at the same time, to prevent re-infection
- Ensure you have enough lotion to treat all those affected and follow the instructions on the packet carefully, e.g. as to how long the treatment must remain on the hair to be effective, how often you may apply the product etc.
- The product may be capable of killing eggs, as well as lice, but there is no certainty of this. Check for baby lice hatching out from eggs 3-5 days after you use it, and again at 10-12 days.

- If the lice appear to be unaffected by the product (some lice may have developed resistance to a particular insecticide) or if the problem persists – then you should take advice from your local school nurse, Sarah Jones (Tel: 07500089361), health visitor, pharmacist or GP, who will be able to advise you on alternative treatments and explain how to use these to best effect. You should seek advice where whoever is being treated is either under 1 year of age, suffers from asthma or allergies, or is pregnant or breast feeding.

Option 2: The “Bug Busting” treatment method

This aims at systematic removal of live lice by combing through the hair and physically removing any lice found. Success depends largely upon adopting a painstaking approach – as described in the “Bug Buster” kit. The kit, which includes an illustrated guide and combs, is available from some pharmacies, and by mail order from:

Community Hygiene Concern, Manor Gardens Centre, 6-9 Manor Gardens, London N7 6LA
Bug Buster: Help Line: 020 7686 4321
Fax: 020 7686 4322
Internet: www.chc.org/bugbusting

- Only one kit is required for a family and it is reusable. Four sessions spaced over 2 weeks are required to clear the lice, as long as the person does not catch more lice, in which case half-weekly sessions must continue.
- Some schools find it helpful to adopt a whole-school approach (where all parents check their children and family members on the same evening and treat as needed). A “Bug Buster” Teaching Pack is available to assist this process. For further information contact Community Hygiene Concern, details as above.
- Taking part on “Bug Busting” days can help to prevent lice circulating, i.e. if all cases are identified and treated successfully at the same time there will be fewer opportunities for lice to circulate amongst children and their families.

This information has been taken from the NHS “The prevention and treatment of Head Lice” leaflet which is available from the school office.