

## Facts about head lice

- Head lice are small, six-legged, wingless insects that live close to the scalp – not much bigger than a pin head.
- Head lice cannot fly, jump or swim.
- Anyone can catch head lice, but children are most affected because they often have close head to head contact.
- Head lice are not fussy about hair length or condition.
- Nits – are the empty white egg sacs from which lice have hatched out.

## Detection

Head lice are well camouflaged and can easily be missed in dry hair. The best detection method is wet combing. Once a week after shampooing, apply conditioner, and use a normal comb to untangle the hair.

Then switch to a fine toothed plastic detection comb (your pharmacist can recommend a suitable one). Slot the comb into the hair at the roots, as close to the scalp as possible, and comb down to the ends of the hair. Thoroughly comb through the whole of the head, checking the comb after every stroke to see if you have found any lice.



*Fully grown head louse (not to scale)*

If you find any head lice, you should check all family members at the same time, and then arrange treatment.

## Treatment

**Treatment is necessary only if you find a living moving louse!**

There are three treatment options. If you want any help in deciding which method to use, please speak to your local pharmacist, health visitor, school nurse or GP.

### ***Option 1: dimeticone 4% lotion***

This lotion works by blocking the holes through which lice breathe and get rid of waste products. It is not an insecticide.

### ***Option 2: insecticide lotion***

There are various types of insecticide lotion. Speak to your pharmacist, health visitor, school nurse or GP for help in choosing one.

## All lotions

Follow the instructions carefully, and leave the lotion on the hair for the full recommended length of time.

Lotions do not kill all the eggs, so whichever one you are using, it is important to apply it a second time after 7 days to kill any newly hatched baby lice.

Always seek advice – when whoever is being treated with a lotion is under the age of 6 months, suffers from asthma or allergies, or is pregnant or breast feeding.

## **Option 3: wet combing**

This method involves combing through the hair and physically removing any lice found. You can buy a suitable plastic comb from your pharmacist, and follow the instructions above for detection combing.

In order for it to work, you have to repeat the combing every 3 days for up to 3 weeks to make sure that all the lice are removed.

Continue until you no longer find any lice for at least 2 treatments in a row.

An alternative to use the 'Bug Buster' kit which is re-usable, and can be used for all members of the family. It is available on prescription, or to buy from some pharmacists, and also be mail order from:

Community Hygiene Concern  
22 Darin Court  
Crownhill  
Milton of Keynes  
MK8 0AD

Bug Buster Helpline:  
01908 561928  
[www.chc.org/bugbusting](http://www.chc.org/bugbusting)  
(Charity reg no: 081371)

### **What about other treatments like essential oils?**

We advise that you only use a treatment method which has been tested and shown to work.

There is no evidence that electronic zappers, tea tree oil, or other preparations that contain chemicals of natural origin work. And remember, "natural" does not always mean "safe".

There is no treatment that can prevent infection.

A large print version of this leaflet is available. Please phone 01463 704886.

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## **Head Lice**

**An information leaflet  
about detecting and  
treating head lice**