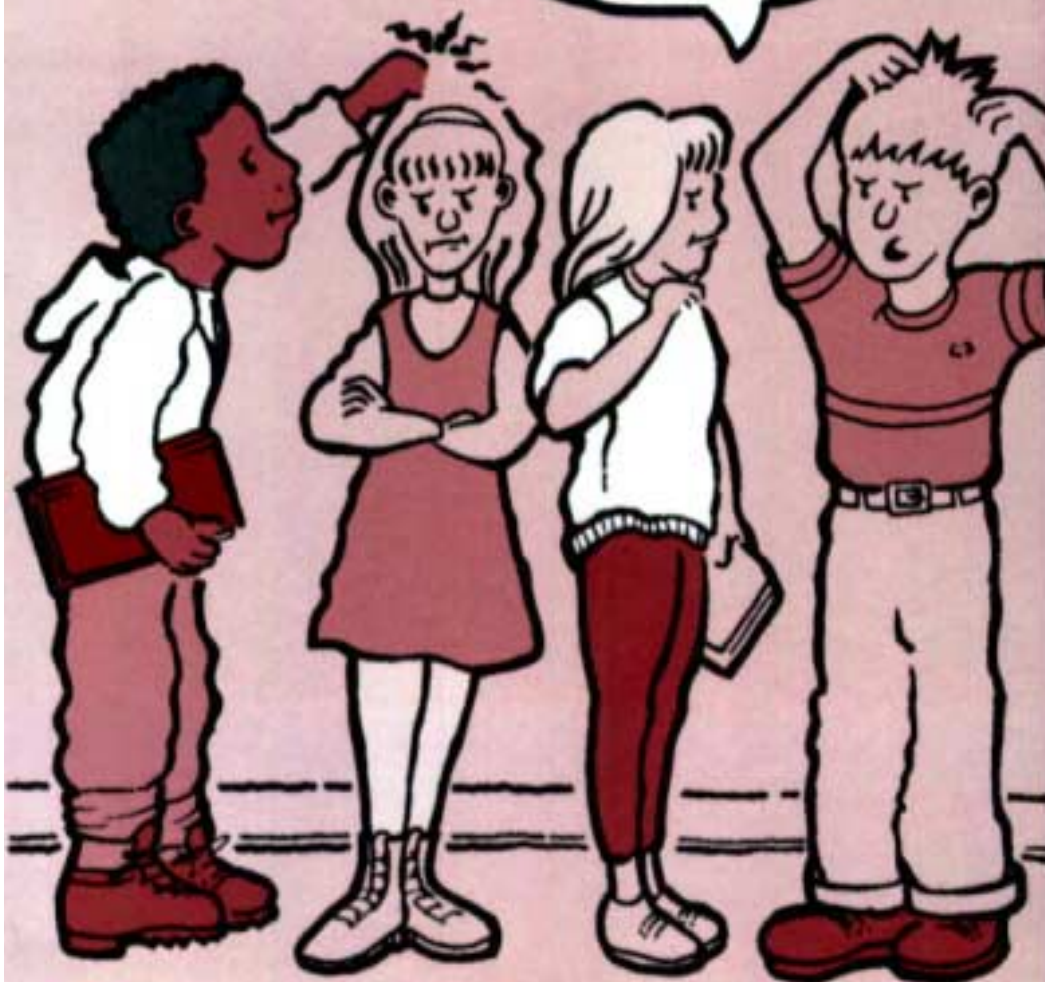




The
prevention
and
treatment
of

head lice

nits!!



Detection and prevention

Lice are most easily detected by fine tooth combing really wet hair. If no lice can be found by careful combing of shampooed hair from the roots, there is no need to consider applying head lice treatments (lotions or rinses), even if there have been cases reported in school. If head lice are discovered, then there are two options to deal with the problem.



The human head louse (*Pediculus humanus capitis*)

A louse egg glued to the hair. Eggs are the size of a small pinhead.



Treatments

1. 'Wet combing' method

Head lice may be cleared over a two week period by the following method:

- Wash the hair in the normal way with an ordinary shampoo;
- Using lots of hair conditioner and while the hair is very wet, comb through the hair from the roots with a fine tooth comb. Make sure the teeth of the comb slot into the hair at the roots with every stroke, and do this over a pale surface, such as a paper towel or the bath;
- Clear the comb of lice between each stroke;
- Wet lice find it difficult to escape, and hair which is slippery from conditioner makes it hard for them to keep a grip - so removal with the comb is easier;
- If you find any lice, then repeat this routine every 3-4 days for 2 weeks, so that any lice emerging from the eggs are removed before they can spread.

This wet combing method is more fully described in literature available from the voluntary organisation "Community Hygiene Concern" who receive grant aid from the Department of Health to help with their "Bug Busting" programmes. A number of schools have adopted "Bug Busting" and information packs for teachers are available to help with a whole school approach. For written information please send three 2nd class stamps loose, plus a self addressed sticky label to:

Community Hygiene Concern
160 Inderwick Road, London N8 9JT

2. Using Lotions

Your school nurse, health visitor or local pharmacist will be able to recommend lotions and rinses which are specially made to kill lice and their eggs quickly and safely. The particular treatment recommended changes from time to time because your local health authority will change from one product to another. This is called a rotational policy. The aim is to prevent head lice becoming resistant to the active ingredient in one particular product. Your pharmacist will be able to explain the correct way to use the product. If the problem persists then you should discuss this further with your family doctor.

Facts

- Head lice are small insects, roughly the size of a match head when fully grown, and usually grey or brown in colour. They are difficult to detect, even under close examination and do not necessarily cause itching.
- Headlice cannot fly, jump or swim, but spread by clambering from head to head. Anyone with hair can catch them, but children, who put their heads together a lot at school or during play, are most commonly affected.
- There tends to be a peak in head lice outbreaks when children return to school in the Autumn, before the problem is brought under control. It is estimated that one in ten primary school children are affected by head lice every year.
- Head lice are not fussy about hair length or condition. Clean hair is no protection. Their main interest is in staying alive, and they achieve this with the unhappy assistance of any human host.
- Head lice feed by sucking blood through the scalp of their host. The female lays eggs in sacs (nits) glued to hairs where the warmth of the scalp will hatch them. The eggs are very small, dull in colour and well camouflaged. They take 7-10 days to hatch. Empty egg sacs are white and shiny, and may be found further along the hair shaft, as the hair grows out. Lice take 7-14 days to become full grown and able to mate, whereupon the female begins laying eggs.

Further advice

If you are worried about head lice or need further advice then you should consult your School Nurse, Health Visitor, Pharmacist or Family Doctor.



Further copies of this leaflet
can be obtained from:

Department of Health

PO Box 410

Wetherby

LS23 7LN

Fax: 01937 845381

© Crown Copyright
Produced by Department of Health
J63/008 12375 PPD 6416 2P FEB 98 SA WTT
CHLORINE FREE PAPER