

Headlice – Information for Parents

The head louse is a mite up to 2.5mm long that feeds blood from the scalp. It needs hair to grip onto and lay eggs (nits) on. It is well camouflaged and highly mobile through the hair. However it cannot survive away from its human host. During prolonged head to head contact and – at no other time – the louse can pass from one person to another. It does not matter whether the hair is clean or dirty, short or long. Headlice are common, but their detection in a school does not mean that the school is the source of the infection. It is simply the place where the problem has been diagnosed.

Early Detection

Regular combing and hair washing should be encouraged as part of normal grooming. This will not however, prevent or get rid of them. Parents should inspect children's heads at least once a week after washing.

Signs to look for:

- Nits at the root of the hair
- Lice on the comb
- Dark specks on pillows

Routine applications of lotions do not prevent head lice, are expensive and may promote resistance or allergy. You need to be more vigilant as routine school inspections are no longer used as a detection method.

When nits or lice are detected - First steps

- Check everyone else in the household and treat those where nits/lice are detected.
- Do not treat the whole household regardless, as to treat a lice free head will build up resistance to the lotions.
- Think of who you may have passed lice onto and warn them.
- There is a good choice of over-the-counter remedies available from your chemist.

Application

- Care in application may be more important than the choice of product. Read the instructions carefully.
- Do not tip the bottle over the head as this is ineffective
- It is better to put a few drops every few centimetres on the hair close to the scalp and work the liquid outwards
- It is important to work it behind the ears and down into the neck
- It is best to repeat the treatment one week later
- When hair has been treated, it is advisable to continue combing and checking the hair every day for the following 14 days
- The eggs are relatively resistant and continued checking will make sure any untreated, newly hatched mites are caught. At the same time other close family contacts should also be checked in case of infestation.

Remember

- Headlice are nothing to be ashamed of
- Anyone can become infected with lice no matter how clean their hair is
- Contact your school nurse or health visitor for more information

*Church View Health Centre, South Kirkby – 01977 653985/ 01977653986
Newstead House, Wakefield – 01924 327531
Castleford Health Centre – 01977 747303*