

Headlice are small insects, about the size of a match head when fully grown. Their colour varies according to the colour of the hair of the host. They crawl from head to head - they do not fly or jump. Anyone with hair can catch headlice.

They are difficult to find in dry hair, but in wet hair they lose their grip, move slowly and can be combed out.

Headlice are not a school problem, but affect everyone in the community. If you find that someone in your family has headlice, it is important that close contacts are informed. They may have them and not know. Think about anyone there has been close contact with:

- Parents/Guardians
- Best Friends
- Brothers and sisters
- Grandparents
- Aunts and Uncles
- Cousins
- Other residents in the house
- School Friends
- Work Colleagues
- Ballet/Gym/Clubs
- Holiday Friends
- Brownies/Guides/Scouts/Cubs
- Playgroup/Toddler Group
- Babysitters/Child Minders
- Nephews and Nieces

Early detection and treatment are vital in dealing with headlice. Parents should check their children's hair once a week.

Two treatments are recommended - wet combing and lotions. It is possible to use wetcombing and lotions separately, but it is best to use both treatments together.

Lotions:

Presently two insecticides are available for the treatment of headlice:

- Malathion
- Phenothrin

It is recommended that water-based lotions are used, as they are less likely to irritate the skin and are more effective. If you choose to use a lotion, follow the manufacturer's instructions.

White empty eggs cases (nits) do not necessarily mean live lice are present. Check for live lice in wet hair using the wet-combing method.

Wet Combing:

This should be used once a week at hair wash time to detect headlice. If live lice are detected this method should be used every three days for two weeks.

Wash the hair, rinse and apply conditioner. Comb through with an ordinary comb to remove the tangles. Using a fine tooth headlice comb, part the hair into sections. Comb through the hair, starting at the scalp and out to the end of the hair. After each stroke check the comb for lice and rinse or wipe the comb. If lice get stuck between the teeth, poke out with a cocktail stick. After combing the entire head, rinse out the conditioner.

Wet combing works because it interferes with the life cycle of the headlouse. Lice take seven days to grow fully, until this time they are unable to lay eggs or move to another head. If full grown lice are removed by wet combing, further eggs will not be laid and the spread of infection will be prevented. The three day follow up procedure removes the newly hatched lice before they become mature. It is important to know that eggs are glued to the hair and cannot be removed by wet combing.

