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# Factsheet on head lice

## The facts about head lice

- Head lice are small parasites that live very close to the scalp.
- Nits are the empty egg cases which stick to the hair.
- Anybody can get head lice – adults and children.
- Head lice do not care if the hair is dirty or clean, short or long.
- Most infections are caught from close family and friends in the home and community.
- Head lice can walk from one head to another, if the heads are pressed together for some time. They do not fly, jump or swim.
- Regular hair care may help to spot lice at an early stage.
- The best way to stop infection is for families to check their heads regularly using detection combing.

## How to detect head lice

In most cases, itching is the main symptom of head lice. It is not caused by the lice biting the scalp but by an allergy to the lice. However, not everyone experiences itching.

It's not always easy to see head lice, so detection combing is the best way of finding head lice. This involves using a special fine-toothed head lice comb (with tooth spacing of less than 0.3mm to trap the smallest lice) to comb through the hair. It works better on wet hair, but can be used on dry hair.

Detection combs are available from pharmacies.

## Treating head lice

Usually, head lice can be treated effectively using medicated lotions or by wet combing, using a specially designed head lice comb.

Wet combing can be used without medicated lotions, but needs to be done regularly and can take a long time to do thoroughly.

Medicated lotion or spray can be used as an alternative. However, no medicated treatment is 100% effective. Your pharmacist will be able to recommend an over-the-counter lotion or spray.

## **Preventing head lice**

It's difficult to prevent a head lice infestation. Regular detection combing – such as on a weekly basis – is the best way to find new lice quickly.

Medicated lotions and sprays do not prevent head lice infestations and should only be used if a live louse has been found on yours or your child's head.

## **Checking the rest of the family**

If you find head lice in your child's hair, check the rest of the family, tell close friends and inform the school.

## **What should I do if the head lice don't go away?**

Check the following.

Did you

- ... follow the manufacturer's instructions?
- ... apply it correctly?
- ... use enough lotion or liquid?
- ... leave it on for the correct amount of time?
- ... use a second bottle 7 days after the first?
- ... check all your close family and inform friends?
- ... check adults as well as children

If the problem persists, seek advice from your GP, school nurse or health visitor.

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Further advice on any of the contents of this leaflet may be obtained from your community infection prevention and control team or Greater Manchester health protection team:

This factsheet has been reviewed by a multi-disciplinary team from the North West and local Programme lead from Greater Manchester Health Protection Team:

Further information may be available from [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)