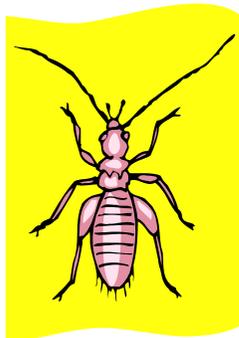




PARENTS GUIDE TO:

Head Lice



Parent Guide No 6

'...achieving excellence for ourselves and others'

Detection combing - how to do it

You need:

Plastic detection comb (from the chemist)

Good lighting

Ordinary comb

- Wash the hair well, then dry it with a towel. The hair should be damp, not dripping.
- Make sure there is good light. Daylight is best.
- Comb the hair with an ordinary comb.
- Start with the teeth of the *detection comb* touching the skin of the scalp at the top of the head. Draw the comb carefully towards the edge of the hair.
- Look carefully at the teeth of the comb in good light.
- Do this over and over again from the top of the head to the edge of the hair in all directions, working round the head.
- Do this for several minutes. It takes 10 to 15 minutes to do it properly for each head.
- If there are head lice, you will find one or more lice on the teeth of the comb.
- Head lice are little insects with moving legs. They are often not much bigger than a pin head, but may be as big as a sesame seed (the seeds on burger buns).
- Clean the comb under the tap. A nail brush helps to do this.

Notes

- You can buy a plastic detection comb from the chemist.

- If you need help and advice, ask your local chemist, health visitor, or family doctor.
- Don't treat unless you are sure that you have found a living, moving louse.
- Don't ever use head louse lotions on your family "just in case". It's never a good idea to use chemicals if they aren't really needed.

If you are sure you have found a living louse:

- Check the heads of all the people in your home.
- Only treat those who have living, moving lice.
- Contact your local chemist, health visitor or family doctor for advice on treatment and what to use.

How you get them

- Head lice can walk from one head to another when the heads are touching for some time.
- You are very unlikely to pick up head lice from brief contact with other people. The longer you have head to head contact with someone who has lice, the more likely it is you will get them too.
- They can't swim, fly, hop or jump. The idea that they can jump may have come from the fact that, when hair is combed, a head louse caught on the teeth of the comb is sometimes flicked off by static electricity (this is one reason why detection combing should be done with damp hair).

You don't get them from objects such as chair backs.

Although it's just possible that a louse might get from one head to another if a hat is shared, this is very unlikely. It's not the way infection is usually caught.

- Head louse infection is not primarily a problem of schools but of the wider community. It cannot be solved by the school, but the school can help the local community to deal with it.
- Head lice are only transmitted by direct, prolonged, head-to-head-contact.
- Transmission of lice within the classroom is relatively rare. When it does occur, it is usually from a "best friend".
- Head lice will not be eradicated in the foreseeable future, but a sensible, informed approach, based on fact not mythology, will help to limit the problem.
- At any one time, most schools will have a few children who have active infection with head lice. This is often between 0% and 5%, rarely more.
- The *perception* by parents and staff, however, is often that there is a serious "outbreak" with many of the children infected. This is hardly ever the case.
- The "outbreak" is often an outbreak of agitation and alarm, not of louse infection; a societal problem not a public health problem.