



Dear Parent/Carers

From time to time we have reports of children in school having head lice. To help you to manage the situation we are publishing this information to assist with detection and control. We ask all parents to regularly monitor their children and follow the advice below to help prevent any further outbreaks.

**WHAT ARE HEADLICE?** Head lice are small (smaller than a match head) insects that can live only on the head.

**WHO CAN GET HEAD LICE?** Anyone can get head lice - they are not a sign of being dirty. Hair can be long or short.

**WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF HEAD LICE AND WHEN DO THEY APPEAR?** Symptoms are itching and scratching of the scalp usually 2-3 weeks after head lice get hold of the head.

**HOW ARE HEAD LICE SPREAD?** Head lice are passed by direct contact of heads, or when personal items (combs, brushes, hats, scarves, headphones, jackets, clothing and bedding) are shared. Head lice only crawl and cannot jump, fly or swim from person to person. Head lice do not spread to pets and you cannot get them from pets. Swimming with someone who has head lice carries no greater risk of transmission than any other activity.

**HOW DO HEAD LICE LIVE?** Head lice lay eggs close to the scalp. The eggs are firmly stuck to the hair, and difficult to see with the naked eye. Eggs can only hatch on the head itself, not elsewhere. Eggs take 7-10 days to hatch and it takes 7-14 days for the head lice to become fully grown, and start laying eggs. Empty egg sacs are white and shiny, and may be found further along the hair, as the hair grows out. Head lice feed by sucking blood through the scalp.

**HOW ARE HEAD LICE DETECTED?** Everyone in the household should be checked. Shampoo hair and apply hair conditioner liberally to make hair slippery. Wet hair makes it difficult for the lice to keep a grip on the hair. Head lice are then easily removed. Comb hair from the scalp outwards with a fine comb, or a 'nit'

comb available from chemists, for ten minutes over a sink or disposable towel. Headlice are present if they fall out or stick to the comb.

Make sure the teeth of the comb slot into the hair at the roots with every stroke. The comb should be washed with water or wiped clean with a paper napkin after each stroke. If no head lice are detected then repeat this procedure each week when the hair is washed, as prevention.

HOW ARE HEAD LICE TREATED? 'Wet Combing method': This method does not use chemicals and is the same as for detecting head lice. Just repeat the method for detecting head lice every day for the first week, then every third day for the second week and once a week for the third and fourth weeks.

The 'Wet Combing method' to detect and remove head lice is effective and recommended, however if live lice are present, a medicated lotion must be used to kill them.

HOW CAN THE FURTHER SPREAD OF HEAD LICE BE AVOIDED? All family members with head lice should be treated promptly. Recently worn clothing (including hats, scarves, jackets and pyjamas) should be washed. Non-washable items such as sports headgear, headphones, stuffed animals and pillows should be stored in plastic bags for a week and then used again.

HOW CAN THE SPREAD OF HEAD LICE BE PREVENTED? Comb hair at least once a day, with a fine tooth comb. Brushing alone is not effective in avoiding head lice.

HOW DO YOU TREAT A HOME OR SCHOOL FOR HEAD LICE? Homes or schools don't get head lice – people do. Head lice are human parasites and require human blood to survive. Vacuuming is the safest and best way to remove lice or fallen hairs with attached nits from upholstered furniture, rugs, stuffed animals or car seats – wherever someone with head lice may have rested their head. Pesticide sprays are unwarranted and may pose personal and environmental hazards. Vacuum and save your time and energy for what benefits you the most – thorough nit removal.