HEAD LICE

Anyone can catch head lice - it's not a sign of being dirty; in fact, head lice prefer clean hair. Head lice will spread anywhere people work, play or live together. School children often get head lice at the start of a new term - then pass lice on to others in their household. Head lice can't be prevented but you can treat it properly and safely when it occurs. Your pharmacist can give you advice on how to stop head lice spreading.

Head lice are wingless insects that make their home in people's hair. They are difficult to see. Their favourite hiding places are behind the ears and on the back of the neck. Head lice feed on human blood and, as they do, spill saliva on to the scalp, making it itchy.

Female lice lay their eggs usually within 1.5cm of the scalp. The eggs (also called nits) are glued to the base of hairs. They hatch in about 7 days.

Head lice are spread by close contact. They do not live long off the body.

IMPORTANT

° If head lice are not treated properly then lice can be passed on to others & continued scratching can cause skin infections.
° Signs of infection include weeping and crusting on the skin, swollen glands and mild fever. If any of these symptoms appear, see your doctor.

Head lice treatments should NOT be used regularly. They do not prevent head lice.

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

• itch - especially toward the back of the scalp, neck and behind the ears or rash caused by scratching
• white specks (the eggs) stuck to base of hair that don't fall out when you shake hair
• tiny dark lice on scalp (difficult to find).

Finding head lice:

° Lice are difficult to find or see. To check for lice apply conditioner to dry hair & comb through hair with a fine-toothed comb
° Wipe the conditioner from the comb onto a paper tissue and look for lice/ eggs on the tissue and comb.
° Repeat the combing for every part of the head at least 5 times.
° Check your child/children every week with the above method.
° You should treat for head lice if you find lice or eggs.
TREATING HEAD LICE
Only use a head lice product if there are signs and symptoms of head lice. Use a product that is best for the current lice outbreak and that suits your needs. Ask your pharmacist.
Instructions as follows:

° Apply the product to all the scalp and hair, from the roots to the tips. For long hair, apply the treatment near the scalp and then use an ordinary comb to spread the treatment down the length of the hair to the tips.
° Leave the product on for the right amount of time - read the instructions.
° Don't let the product get into the eyes - cover eyes with a tightly rolled cloth or towel.
° Wash the product out of hair well with water. A hair conditioner will help get knots out.
° Dry hair with a towel (don't use a hair dryer as it breaks down head lice products).
° Head lice products will kill nits but won't remove them from the hair.
° While hair is still damp, comb hair with a special fine-toothed comb to remove dead lice and nits (ask your pharmacist). Comb a few strands at a time. Start close to the scalp and comb hair upwards.
° Check for lice again 7-10 days after treating. A second treatment may be necessary.
° Ask y Nits more than 2cm from the scalp are usually dead or have hatched.
° If needed, a second treatment should be applied 7 days after the first treatment. Any eggs left alive after the first treatment will hatch in 7 days so there's no point in re-treating any sooner.

Reminder: Head lice treatments should NOT be used regularly. They do not prevent head lice.

Preventing head lice spreading
Treat any family members who show signs of head lice (except women who are pregnant and infants). Other family members should be checked regularly.
• Don't share brushes, combs, hats or scrunchies. Wash brushes, combs, etc., in hot soapy water. Dry them in the sun.
• For persistent infections it may also help to wash towels, sheets and pillowcases.

SELF CARE
• Keep children away from school or pre-school until they have been fully treated.
• Check children's hair for head lice or nits at least once a week if their friends have head lice.
• Keep long hair tied back – pigtails, plaits or ponytails.
• Head lice products are poisons, so keep them out of reach of children.
• Don't use head lice products with a spirit base near heaters or open fires. They are highly flammable (check the label).
• Don't let children use head lice products by themselves.

Information from the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia