About head lice

Head lice have been around for many thousands of years. Anyone can get head lice and given the chance head lice move from head to head without discrimination.

- Head lice are small, wingless, blood sucking insects.
- Their colour varies from whitish-brown to reddish-brown.
- People get head lice from direct hair to hair contact with another person who has head lice.
- Head lice do not have wings so they cannot fly from head to head. They can only crawl.

Finding head lice

Lice can crawl and hide. The easiest and most effective way to find them is to use the conditioner and comb method by following these steps:

Step 1
Comb any type of hair conditioner on to dry, brushed (detangled) hair. This stuns the lice and makes it difficult for them to grip the hair or crawl around.

Step 2
Comb sections of the hair with a fine tooth, head lice comb. Starting from the bottom at the back of the head & working up towards the top of the head in small sections. Be sure to check behind the ears as well.

Step 3
Wipe the conditioner from the comb onto a paper towel or tissue.

Step 4
Look on the tissue and on the comb for lice and eggs.

Step 5
Repeat the combing for every part of the head at least 4 or 5 times

If lice or eggs are found, the child’s hair should be treated.

Head lice eggs are small (the size of a pinhead) and oval. A live egg will 'pop' when squashed between fingernails. Eggs can be distinguished from dandruff as they will stick to the hair.
The Life Cycle of Head Lice

1. Egg is laid on hair shaft. Egg is called a 'nit'.
2. Louse emerges after 6-7 days.
3. First moult 2 days after hatching.
4. Second moult 5 days after hatching.
5. Third moult 10 days after hatching.
6. Emerging from their third moult as adult lice, the female and slightly similar male begin to reproduce.
7. Female lays first egg 1 or 2 days after mating.
8. Female can lay approximately 3 to 8 eggs per day for the next 16 days.
9. Having lived 32 to 35 days the louse dies.

Treating head lice

- **No treatment kills all of the eggs** so treatment must involve two applications seven days apart.
- If you are using lotions, apply the product to dry hair.
- The bedding (sheets, doona covers and especially the pillow cases) require specific laundering; either wash it in hot water (at least 60 degrees centigrade) using the solution / lotion or dry it using a clothes dryer on the hot or warm setting. We recommend you also wash all hair ties, brushes, combs etc that are used in the house by soaking them in diluted solution.
- There is no product available that prevents head lice. Using the conditioner and comb method once a week will help you detect any head lice early and minimise the problem. Tying back long hair can help prevent the spread of head lice.
- Combs with long, rounded stainless steel teeth positioned very close together have been shown to be the most effective, however, any head lice comb can be used.