

HEAD LICE

Information & Guidance



WINTON PRIMARY SCHOOL

1. What are head lice?



Head lice are tiny insects with six legs that live in hair, on or very close to the scalp and also move around your scalp. They are often not much bigger than a pin head and rarely bigger than a sesame seed. They're largely harmless, but can live in the hair for a long time if not treated. Nits are not the same thing as lice, they are the empty egg cases attached to hair that head lice hatch from.

They are most common in children between the ages of 4 and 11 and more common in girls than boys.

2. How you get them?

Anybody can get head lice but they are much rarer in adults. Head louse infection is a problem of the whole community, not just the school. Head lice are picked up by head-to-head contact. They cannot be caught from animals. National statistics show about 5% of the school population will be affected at any given time.

3. How to spot them?

Head lice can be difficult to spot, even when the head is closely inspected. They're very small whitish or grey-brown insects that range from the size of a pinhead to the size of a sesame seed.

The only way to be sure someone has head lice is to find a live louse by combing their hair with a special fine-toothed comb. This is called detection combing.

4. Symptoms



Head lice have to feed on human blood several times a day to survive and often make the scalp itchy.

Features of an infestation can include:

- » an itchy scalp
- » a rash on the back of the neck
- » feeling as though something is moving in the hair.

Other features may include: a sticky weeping scalp; small itchy pink bumps around the edge of the scalp,

particularly on the back of the neck; enlarged glands in the neck, and impetigo (bacterial infection); small white eggs or nits in the hair behind the ears or at back of the neck eggs which are fixed firmly to hair.

5. How to treat them

Treatments to get rid of head lice are available FREE from pharmacies that are part of the minor ailments service. You don't usually need to see your GP. The main treatments are:

- » lotions or sprays that kill head lice – these can be very effective, but some aren't suitable for pregnant or breastfeeding women, or for children under two
- » removing head lice with a specially designed comb – this is suitable for everyone and needs to be repeated several times. Detection combs are special fine-toothed plastic combs that you can buy from your local pharmacy, supermarket or online. A comb with flat-faced teeth and a tooth spacing of 0.2-0.3mm is best. Detection combing can be carried out on dry or wet hair. Dry combing takes less time, but wet combing is more accurate.

When you have got rid of the lice, you might still itch for two or three weeks. This doesn't mean you still have lice.

If you still have problems, get in contact with the school nurse (details on the last page of the leaflet) or your family doctor.

6. How to prevent



It's very difficult to prevent head lice.

You may want to consider regular detection combing – for example, on a weekly basis – if you're concerned about your children or yourself.

We recommend parents to send children with long hair to school with their hair tied up as this makes a big difference in preventing the spread of nits.

KEY POINTS

A child only has head lice if you find live lice in their hair. Nits (eggs) will remain in the hair for some time and just need combing out.

Schools cannot send out letters when there is a case of nits as up to 5% of the school will have them at any one time. Letters would go out each day and mean nothing.

Tie your child's hair up. Lice can only be caught through head to head contact and long hair being tied up helps reduce the risk of getting head lice.

Remember you do not need to pay for treatments – just go to a pharmacy that is part of the minor ailments service and they will be able to provide free treatment. For more details, go to

<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Pharmacy/Pages/Commonconditions.aspx>

Tell your child's class teacher – they will keep an eye out for any live lice and talk to any parents of children with head lice. They can also ensure hair is tied up to prevent the spread of lice.

You do not need to keep your child off school. If you do the absence will **not** be authorised as the government guidance is for children to be treated only if there are live lice and that nothing is achieved by a child having time off.

Many people believe the best treatment and prevention is regular combing with a special comb.

If you continue to experience problems talk to the school nurse or your GP.

Contact details for the School Nurse

Maria Coombs

Moordown Clinic

Phone: 01202 518260



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