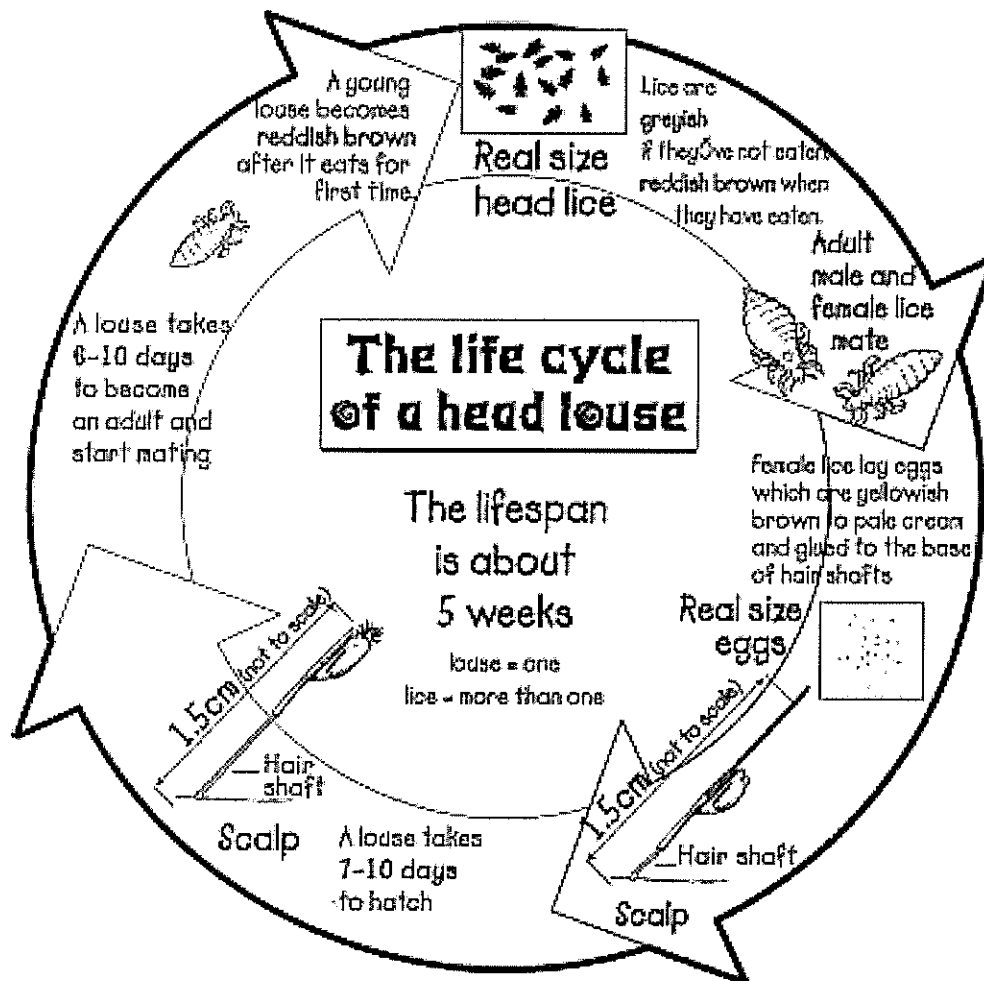


# Head lice: the facts



## Some facts about head lice:

- Head lice are tiny insects. They do not have wings, so they **cannot fly**. Head lice have strong claws and swing from hair to hair – they **cannot jump**.
- Head lice can only survive on **human heads**. They live on the hair and suck blood from the scalp. Head lice must feed every six hours or they will die from dehydration.
- Head lice can only be spread from one person to another by direct head-to-head contact.
- The female louse lays five to 12 eggs per day (up to 300 in her life time). Eggs remain strongly glued to the hair, even after hatching. Eggs are sometimes called nits.
- Live eggs need the warmth and moisture of the scalp to hatch and will be found up to 1.5cm from the scalp.
- Eggs that are further than 1.5cm from the scalp are either dead or hatched and do not require further treatment.
- At any one time, it is possible to have adult head lice, young lice and eggs.
- Anyone can get head lice – they have no preferences for cleanliness, hair colour, hair type, ethnicity or age.
- Only the insects (adults and young lice) can move from one head to another. Eggs cannot spread.
- Dandruff and hair particles can be mistaken for eggs.
- Head lice are a nuisance but they **do not** cause disease or illness.

## Conditioner and combing : a technique for the detection and/or treatment of head lice

- Conditioner and combing is the most effective way of finding head lice.
- Conditioner and combing is also an effective way of treating head lice, particularly mild conditions.
- The conditioner stuns the lice for some minutes so they can be easily removed.
- Conditioner and combing is cheap. It also avoids the use of head lice chemicals (insecticides).
- Conditioner and combing is easy for older children to learn to do for themselves.
- Using conditioner and combing every two days between chemical treatments removes young lice as they hatch from the eggs. No insecticide will kill the eggs.

### For conditioner and combing you will need:

- white hair conditioner
- an ordinary comb
- a fine tooth comb
- hair clips
- white tissues or material
- good light
- a magnifying glass
- a mirror if combing yourself
- a plastic container
- an old toothbrush, safety pin or dental floss



## Conditioner and combing detection

1. Untangle dry hair with an ordinary comb.
2. Apply hair conditioner to **dry hair**. Use enough conditioner to thoroughly cover the whole scalp and all hair from the roots to tips.
3. Use the ordinary comb to evenly distribute conditioner and divide the hair into four or more sections using the hair clips. A mirror helps if combing yourself.
4. Change to a head lice comb.
5. Start with a section at the back of the head. Place the teeth of the head lice comb flat against the scalp. Comb the hair from the roots through to the tips.
6. Wipe the comb on the tissue or material after each stroke. In good light, check for head lice. Adult lice are easier to see – young lice are difficult to see. A magnifying glass will help. You may see some eggs.
7. Comb each section twice until you have combed the whole head. If the comb becomes clogged, use the old toothbrush, dental floss or safety pin to remove the head lice or eggs.

**If you find head lice, decide on a treatment option.**

**If you choose the conditioner and combing as a treatment, see box below.**

If you choose a chemical treatment, wash the conditioner off and allow the hair to dry before applying a chemical treatment. Follow the instructions in *Treatment*.

## Conditioner and combing treatment

1. Follow all steps in box above.
2. Keep combing the whole head until all the hair conditioner is gone.
3. Repeat the conditioner and combing every 2 days until you find no more head lice for 10 consecutive days. You will be removing all the adult lice and any young lice that hatch from the eggs.

## Cleaning up after conditioner and combing detection and/or treatment

1. Place all tissues or material in a plastic bag, tie the top and put it in the bin.
2. Wash hair normally.
3. Soak combs in soapy hot water (just after boiling) for at least 30 seconds to ensure head lice are killed (this should be done by an adult). When the water has cooled, use an old toothbrush to remove the debris.

## When treatment does not seem to work

It is very frustrating when you are doing everything that is recommended and nothing seems to work. Some possible reasons for this may include:

### Poor application of the product

- Whether using a hair conditioner or a chemical treatment, the product must be applied to all hairs, from the roots to the tips.
- If using a chemical product, it must be in contact with the head lice for the right amount of time. Leave the product on the hair for the time stated on the label.

### Applying only one treatment

- Applying any treatment only once will fail (conditioner and combing or chemical treatments). Even if the lice are killed or removed, the eggs will continue to hatch.
- If choosing the conditioner and combing treatment repeat every two days until there are no head lice found for 10 consecutive days.
- If choosing chemical treatments reapply usually one week later, paying careful attention to the instructions on the package.

### Resistance to chemical treatments

- Resistance is when the chemical treatment does not kill the head lice.
- You will not know if the head lice are resistant to the chemical treatment you are using before

you try it. The only way to know is to check for effectiveness after you have used it (see *Treatment*).

- Resistance can be a complex issue. Some lice don't die, some take longer to die.
- The best way of addressing resistance is to check for effectiveness at each treatment (See *Treatment*). Conditioner and combing is an effective method to use if resistance is a problem.
- The use of smaller doses of chemical products for prevention doesn't work and increases resistance.

### Catching head lice again

- Sometimes the treatment has worked, but you may have head lice again. This is a new head lice condition.
- By checking every week you will be able to manage a new head lice condition easily with conditioner and combing because you have caught the condition early and there will be fewer lice present.

Assistance is available. See information sheet *Who can help me?* and please contact the school administration with any concerns.

