

Head lice: Frequently asked questions

Do head lice fly, jump or hop?

No, head lice cannot fly, hop or jump, but can only crawl. For head lice to spread, close head-to-head contact is needed.

Who is affected by head lice?

Head lice are most frequently found in pre-school and primary school children. This is likely due to the way young children play, with close head-to-head contact, giving head lice the chance to crawl from one person to another.

Do head lice live on animals or in carpets and upholstery?

Head lice do not live on animals. Head lice and their eggs can only survive for two to three days away from the human scalp, so can't live in the carpet. Objects such as combs, brushes, hats, and bedding pose only a minor risk for transmission.

Do head lice spread disease?

No. Head lice are not known to transmit disease.

Bites from head lice can often become itchy due to an allergic reaction to lice saliva and infections may occur if the bites are scratched.

Scratching should be avoided. However, if bites do become infected, a doctor should be consulted as antibiotic treatment may be necessary.

Do head lice prefer a particular hair or blood type?

No. Head lice are not selective and do not prefer a particular hair type or length. Head lice can infest hair that is clean or dirty.

How do you prevent head lice?

Head lice infestation cannot be prevented. However, checking your child's head regularly using the wet combing technique will enable early detection. There is currently no research to prove that any chemical treatments can prevent head lice.

Does the wet-combing technique work?

Yes. Wet combing can be used to check for and treat head lice. Conditioner stuns head lice for approximately 20 minutes and also makes the hairs slippery. This makes it easier to remove head lice from the head.

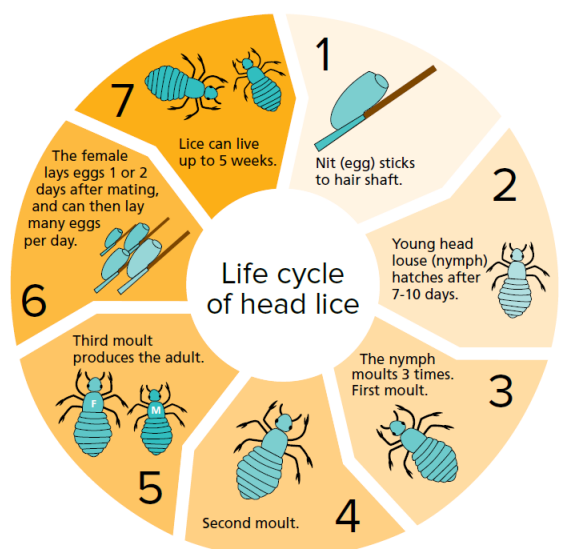
How does chemical treatment work?

There are four categories of chemical treatment available in Australia. Each type of chemical treatment aims to kill lice and/or eggs.

Why do you have to treat the hair again after seven days?

It is important to treat the hair after seven days because head lice eggs can take this long to hatch.

A single chemical treatment will usually not kill all the lice and eggs present. A second treatment is usually required to kill any newly hatched lice before they can produce new eggs.



Do all members of the family need to be treated?

No. If one member of the family has head lice, it is important to regularly check the whole family using the wet combing technique, to ensure early detection of a head lice infestation. Only infested family members need to be treated.

Why do treatments sometimes fail?

It is not uncommon for treatments to fail. The four main reasons for treatment failure include:

- > inadequate application of product.
- > lice resistance to the treatment chemical used.
- > failure to re-treat to kill newly hatched nymphs.
- > re-infestation.

Do I need to treat the home?

No. Bedding, combs, brushes and hats pose only a minor risk of transmission. However, bedding may be washed at 60°C, and the sharing of brushes and hats should be avoided. Treatment should be focussed on the head.

Why does my child keep getting re-infested?

Finding more head lice a week after treatment does not suggest re-infestation. It is more likely due to a treatment failure. Re-infestation should not be suspected unless all possible causes of treatment failure have been ruled out.

Do children have to miss school if they have head lice?

No. Children can return to school after they have started treatment for head lice. The first thorough treatment (chemical treatment or wet-combing) should be sufficient for re-admission to school.

Who is responsible for treating head lice?

Parents or guardians are responsible for treating their child's head lice. Pre-schools, schools and child care centres are not.



For more information

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