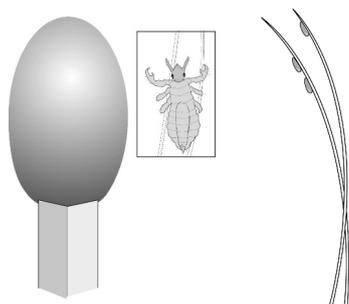


HEAD LICE



Head lice are tiny, whitish or grey-brown insects that live in hair. Nits are the empty egg cases that are left behind after the lice have hatched. Head lice can be difficult to spot; they are smaller than the head of a match. Nits stay glued to the hairs and look like dandruff.

Anyone can get head lice but they are a common problem in school children aged 4 to 11 years old.

If you have head lice, you may have an itchy scalp, a rash on the back of your neck, or feel that something is moving in your hair.

Finding a live louse is the only way to be sure that you have head lice. Check for head lice by combing your, or your child's, hair with a special detection comb.

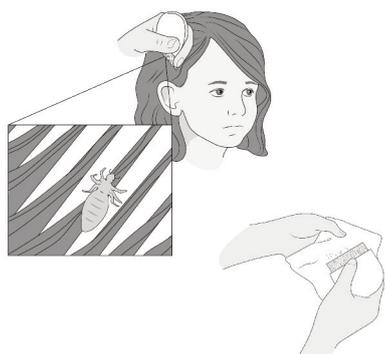
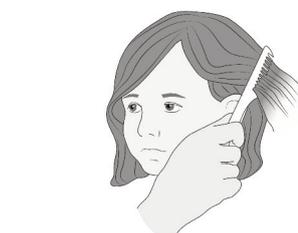
How do I check hair for head lice?



Check for lice by detection combing when the hair is wet or dry. Wet combing is more accurate because washing with conditioner stops head lice moving.

Wet detection and treatment combing:

- Wash the hair with normal shampoo and put plenty of hair conditioner on it.
- Use an ordinary, wide-toothed comb first to untangle the hair.
- When the comb moves freely through the hair, change to using the detection comb.
- Make sure you slot the comb in gently between the hairs at the roots, with the edge of the teeth lightly touching the scalp.
- Draw the detection comb down through the hair carefully, starting at the roots and finishing at the ends of the hair.
- Check the comb for lice at the end of every stroke.
- Remove lice from the comb by wiping with a tissue or by rinsing the comb.
- Work through the hair, section by section, until the whole head of hair has been combed through.
- Do this at least twice, to make sure you haven't missed any areas and continue until you find no more lice.



Dry detection combing:

- Use an ordinary, wide-toothed comb first to untangle the hair.
- When the comb moves freely through the hair, change to using the detection comb.
- Make sure you slot the comb in gently between the hairs at the roots, with the edge of the teeth lightly touching the scalp.
- Draw the detection comb down through the hair carefully, starting at the roots, and finishing at the ends of the hair.
- Look for lice as the comb is drawn through the hair.
- If you see a louse, trap it against the face of the comb with your thumb.
- Comb each section of the hair 3 or 4 times before moving on to the next section, until the whole head of hair has been combed through.

How can I treat head lice?

Wet combing hair using a detection comb (see 'How do I check hair for head lice?'). This method of removing the head lice with a special fine-toothed comb can work well and it may not be necessary to use anything else. NHS Choices has a useful video on wet combing called 'how do I check for and treat head lice'. Type 'head lice' in to the search box on the NHS Choices website (www.nhs.uk) or view the video [here](#)

If you find live head lice during detection combing (wet or dry) check the rest of your household and treat everyone with live head lice on the same day. You don't need to treat if you find nits but no living lice.

Wet comb the hair every 4 days for at least 4 times. This way you will remove any lice that have just hatched out. When you have had 3 sessions in a row where you found no lice, you can be confident that you have got rid of the head lice.

If you have Afro or tightly curled hair, wet combing may not work very well on its own. Use a treatment like **dimeticone 4% lotion (Hedrin)** or **cyclomethicone isopropyl myristate liquid (Full Marks)** as well. Also try using treatments if wet combing alone hasn't worked.

Hedrin lotion:

Don't use Hedrin lotion on children aged under 6 months.

1. Rub Hedrin lotion into dry hair and apply enough to cover the scalp. Often 50ml is enough for short to shoulder length hair and 150ml is enough for long, thick hair.
2. Let the hair dry by itself and keep the hair away from sources of fire and flames.
3. Leave the lotion on for 8 hours (or overnight) and then wash the hair with shampoo.
4. After a week, Repeat steps 1 to 3.
5. Use detection combing to check the hair for living lice 2 or 3 days after the second treatment (step 4).
6. Check again 7 days after the first check.

Full Marks:

Don't use Full Marks on children aged under 2 years, or in women who are pregnant or breastfeeding.

1. Rub Full Marks into dry hair. Often 50ml is enough for short to shoulder length hair and 150ml is enough for long, thick hair. Keep the hair away from fire and flames.
2. Wait for 10 minutes and then comb out the dead lice and eggs with a detection comb.
3. Wash the hair with normal shampoo.
4. After a week repeat steps 1 to 3.
5. Use detection combing to check the hair for living lice 2 or 3 days after the repeat treatment (step 4).
6. Check again 7 days after the first check.

What else can help?

If you are worried about getting head lice, check for lice once a week using a detection comb. This will help you to treat them quickly if you or your family do get them. Plaiting or braiding the hair can make it difficult for head lice to attach themselves to the bottom of the hair strand. Keeping Afro or tightly curled hair short may make it easier to treat.

I can't get rid of my head lice. What can I do?

- Check your wet combing technique is correct. Make sure you are wet combing often enough, combing for long enough and combing all of the hair from top to bottom and in small sections.
- If your combing technique is good but you are still finding live lice it may be that you have caught head lice again, perhaps by contact with someone who has head lice. If so, then continue to wet comb as before until you've had 3 clear wet combing sessions.
- Try another treatment method. If you've tried wet combing and it isn't working then ask your pharmacist about trying Hedrin or Full Marks. You must show your pharmacist a louse to get one of these treatments. Remove a louse from the hair and stick it to a piece of white paper with cello tape.
- If treatment with Hedrin or Full Marks has not worked then check whether you have been using enough liquid or have been leaving it on for long enough. Try using the treatment again, making sure you follow the instructions carefully. Ask your pharmacist if the instructions are not clear.

Do I need to see my doctor?

No, not usually. However, if you scratch your scalp, the skin can get infected. See your doctor if you think you have an infection. Signs of an infection are: a high temperature, feeling ill, red and swollen skin that may have fluid leaking out, crusts or pus.

Can I give head lice to other people?

Yes, it's easy to pass head lice on to anyone if your head comes into contact with theirs. Head lice can't jump or fly, so they walk along hairs from one head to another. If you have head lice, your close friends and all people living in your house should also check their hair. They will only need treatment if they find living lice in their hair.

Away from a person's head, head lice only live for 1 or 2 days. Therefore, you are unlikely to get head lice by using the pillows, hairbrushes or hats of people with head lice. Also, you don't need to wash bedding or clothes any more often than usual.

Do I need to keep my child away from school if they have head lice?

There is no need to keep your child away from school if they have head lice, but let the school know if you find living lice in your child's hair.

Where can I find further information?

NHS Direct Wales: www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk

NHS Direct Wales Tel: 0845 4647 (open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

Calls from landlines and mobiles cost 2p per minute, in addition to telephone providers access charge.