

HEAD LICE TREATMENT OPTIONS

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS AND CARERS

There are two treatment options for head lice.

1. Mechanical removal (removal with a head lice comb)
2. Chemical removal

Mechanical removal

Mechanical removal involves applying normal hair conditioner to dry hair. After covering all of the hair with the conditioner untangle it using a normal comb and separate the hair into sections. Then use a fine long toothed metal lice comb to comb through the hair in sections. The conditioner doesn't kill the lice but it stuns them for about 20 minutes making it easier to remove them. The lice comb will remove nits (eggs) and the stunned lice. Wipe the comb on a white tissue and check for any lice or nits. Keep combing until no more appear on the tissue. This method should be used every second day until none remain (usually about 7 to 10 days).

This method is the preferred way to treat head lice because it is effective, does not contribute to insecticide resistance in head lice and also has a low risk of skin irritation.

The mechanical removal method also helps manage head lice before they become established on the head. Keep a good head lice comb in the shower and every time your family washes their hair comb through with the lice comb. This makes sure the lice are caught before they lay too many eggs.

If your children are old enough to wash their own hair encourage them to use the comb themselves. Or keep the comb handy to where you wash your children's hair and use it every time you wash their hair.

Chemical removal

If you choose to use a chemical treatment, remember to follow the instructions carefully. Don't be tempted to re-apply the same chemical treatment if it doesn't appear to be working. Instead change to another treatment that uses a different chemical compound or use the comb and conditioner method. You must repeat the treatment in 7 days to kill any newly hatched eggs. You will also need to use a lice comb to make sure the treatment is working. If you find dead lice the product has worked. If you find live lice, the treatment has not worked.

When your child is free of lice and nits, remember to check regularly with a fine toothed lice comb and conditioner. Early detection and treatment will prevent re-infestation of family members and classmates.

What to do about bedding and clothing

Research suggests that bed linen, hats, clothing and furniture do not harbour or transmit lice or nits and that there is no benefit in washing them as a treatment option. Nits and lice only live on the human head. They quickly dehydrate and die if removed from the head.

*This information is based on information provided on the NSW Health Nitbusters website.