

How can you tell if you have head lice?

What are head lice and nits?

Head lice are tiny grey/brown insects. They are about the size of a sesame seed (the seeds on burger buns). Head lice cling to hairs but stay close to the scalp which they feed off. Head lice lay eggs which hatch after 7-10 days. It takes about 10 days for a newly hatched louse to grow into an adult and start to lay eggs.

Nits are the empty white eggshells which are left when the lice hatch. Nits look like dandruff but stick strongly to hair. Unlike dandruff, you cannot easily brush out nits.

Head lice are difficult to find just by looking in the hair. If you suspect that you or your child has head lice, it is best to do wet hair detection combing.

Detection combing: wet hair method

This will take 5-15 minutes to check each head, depending on hair length and thickness.

- Wash the hair in the normal way with ordinary shampoo
- Rinse out the shampoo and put on lots of ordinary conditioner.
- Comb the hair with a normal comb to get rid of tangles.
- When the hair is untangled switch to a detection comb. This is a special fine-toothed comb. (The teeth of normal combs are too far apart and the teeth of 'nit combs' are too close together.) Pharmacies stock detection combs.
- Slot the teeth of the detection comb into the hair at the roots so it is touching the scalp.
- Draw the detection comb through to the tips of the hair.
- Make sure that all parts of the hair are combed by working around the head.
- Check the comb for lice after each stroke. **A magnifying glass may help.**
- If you see any lice, clean the comb by wiping it on a tissue or rinse it before the next stroke.
- After the whole head has been combed, rinse out the conditioner.
- Repeat the combing procedure in the wet hair to check for any lice that might have been missed the first time.

If you find live lice, proceed with treatment. Methods and recommendations are outlined on the resources on the front of this page.

A case of Head Lice has been reported in your child's classroom. Anyone can get head lice. Head lice are common in school children, are not a sign of poor hygiene and are not associated with serious disease.

Public Health no longer recommends dry head checks in the school setting. Dry head checks and head checks for "nits" lead to incorrect diagnosis and the unnecessary use of chemical treatments. Identifying nits close to the scalp does not always indicate that a live lice infestation has or will occur.

Please check your child's head for the presence of **live** head lice. Research has shown that the **best method to detect live lice is the wet combing technique**, as described on the back of this letter. If you find **live lice**, check the members of your household for live lice. **Treat your child and family only if live lice are found.**

If you see **live lice**, the preferred treatment method is 2 chemical treatments separated by 7-10 days. Chemical treatments, hair conditioners and lice combs are available at drugstores. It is important that you follow the directions carefully. Please complete the first treatment before your child returns to school. Once you have completed the first treatment please inform the school and the parents of your child's close playmates. Remind your child not to share personal items such as combs, brushes, or hats.

Early detection and appropriate treatment will significantly reduce lice in our school. For further information on how to detect and treat live lice see:

www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/head_lice

www.cps.ca/documents/position/head-lice

www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthfiles/hfile06.stm

Please contact the school or your local Public Health Unit if you require additional information.