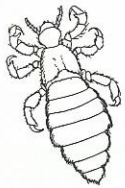


# HEAD LICE

Head lice are spread by head-to-head contact with someone who already has head lice. Anyone can catch head lice, both children and adults. You can not prevent head lice, but learning how to spot (detection combing) and treat lice and the proper use of the right product can make the treatment more successful. It is important to trace everyone who has been in close contact with the person who has head lice (contact tracing).

Ask a pharmacist how to spot and treat head lice, which products to use and how to trace those who have been in close contact.

Head lice are wingless insects that make their home in people's hair. They are often difficult to see. Their favourite hiding places are behind the ears and at the back of the neck. Head lice feed on human blood and, as they do, spill saliva on to the scalp, often making it itchy.



head lice  
(magnified)



live egg (nit)  
attached to hair  
(magnified)

Female lice lay their eggs (also called nits) near the base of hairs, usually within 1.5cm of the scalp. The eggs are glued to the hairs and hatch in about seven days.

## Signs and symptoms

- Tickling or itching feeling of something moving in the hair
- Sores caused by scratching - which can become infected
- Pale, white specks (the eggs) stuck to base of hair that do not fall out when the hair is shaken
- Tiny dark lice on the scalp or hair.

## Finding head lice (detection combing)

An easy way to find lice and eggs is the 'conditioner and comb' method:

- To DRY hair, apply enough hair

conditioner to cover each hair from root to tip. Apply the conditioner evenly and detangle hair.

- Comb the conditioner through hair with a lice comb (ask a pharmacist).
- Start at the scalp and work through the hair carefully in sections.
- After each stroke, wipe the conditioner off the comb onto a paper tissue and look for lice and eggs. Remove all eggs and lice from the comb after each stroke.
- Repeat the combing for every part of the head at least five times, and then thoroughly rinse the hair.

## IMPORTANT

If head lice are not found and treated properly then:

- Lice can be passed on to others
- Continued scratching can cause skin infections.

Signs of infection include weeping and crusting on the skin, swollen glands and mild fever. If any of these symptoms appear, see a doctor.

Head lice treatments do not prevent head lice and should NOT be used regularly. Overuse of treatments can cause irritation to the scalp. It may also lead to head lice becoming resistant to treatments. If after two treatments with a head lice product you think the lice are still present, DO NOT treat again until you have spoken to a pharmacist or doctor.

## Head lice contact tracing sheet

School children often get head lice at the start of a new term, then pass the lice on to others. If your child has head lice you are advised to contact everyone your child has been in close contact with over the past few weeks. This includes family and friends, young or old, tell them to check themselves and their families for head lice. Only those who have head lice should be treated.

Draw up a contact tracing sheet such as the one below as a useful reminder.

### Write the names here

Family members (e.g. parents/guardians/  
brothers/sisters/grandparents/aunts/uncles/  
cousins/other residents in the home

School friends

Work colleagues

Out of school friends  
e.g. brownies/scouts

Other e.g. neighbours/playgroup etc

## Treating head lice

- Use enough product to thoroughly cover the scalp, including the back of the neck and behind the ears.
- The product should be kept out of the eyes. Protect the eyes with a shampoo shield when applying the product. If the product does get into the eyes, rinse out with water immediately.
- The products should not be used on babies under the age of six months, except on your doctor's advice.
- Only use a head lice product if you find lice or eggs.
- Itching may continue for one week after the head lice have been cleared up.
- No lice treatment kills 100% of eggs. A second treatment may be necessary seven days after the first one, to kill any lice that may have hatched—ask your pharmacist.

## Self care

- Ask a pharmacist for a product that best suits your needs.
- Other people who have been in close contact should be traced and thoroughly checked (contact tracing).

Your **Self Care** Pharmacist

DAVID S. NOLTE PHARMACY 21767P  
701 RATHDOWNE ST, NTH CARLTON 9349 1522

- Check children's hair for head lice or nits at least once a week (detection combing).
- Do not use head lice products with a spirit base near heaters or open fires. They are highly flammable (check the label).
- Dry hair with a towel (do not use a hair drier as it breaks down head lice products).
- Only treat if head lice or eggs are found.

## Recommended reading

Head Lice Information Sheet, Assoc. Prof. R. Speare—  
<http://www.jcu.edu.au/school/phtm/PHTM/hlice/hlinfo1.htm>

## Contact:

A doctor – listed under 'medical practitioners' in the yellow pages of the phone book

A Self Care pharmacist. To find: (02) 6283 4777

In case of poisoning, phone the Poisons Information Centre on 13 11 26 from anywhere in Australia.

Pharmacists are medicines experts. Ask a pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.



*Pharmacy Self Care has a strong commitment to providing current and reliable health information.  
The information in this card was current at time of printing.*

