

## HEAD LICE

### What are headlice?

Head lice are tiny insects that live in hair. Nits are the empty egg cases attached to hair that head lice hatch from. Headlice are more common in children but can affect anyone of any age. They are not a sign of dirty hair or poor hygiene and close hair-to-hair contact is needed to pass lice on. Head lice cannot jump or fly but walk from one head to another. When away from hair they soon die and cannot live in bedding or clothes etc.



Head lice can be difficult to spot, even when the head is closely inspected. They're very small whitish or grey-brown insects that range from the size of a pinhead to the size of a sesame seed.

The only way to be sure someone has head lice is to find a live louse by combing their hair with a special fine-toothed comb. This is called detection combing.

Less reliable signs of head lice include:

- small white eggs or nits (egg cases) in the hair behind the ears or at back of the neck – see image above
- an itchy scalp
- a rash on the back of the neck
- feeling as though something is moving in the hair

### How to get rid of headlice and nits

You can buy an over the counter treatment from your pharmacist who will advise you if you are not sure what to buy. Alternatively, you can use a detection comb which is a special fine-toothed plastic comb that you can buy from your pharmacy, supermarket or online. Detection combing can be carried out on dry or wet hair. Dry combing takes less time, but wet combing is more accurate because washing with conditioner stops head lice moving.

To use the wet detection method:

- Wash the hair with ordinary shampoo and apply plenty of conditioner.
- Use an ordinary, wide-toothed comb to straighten and untangle the hair.
- Once the comb moves freely through the hair without dragging, switch to the louse detection comb.
- Make sure the teeth of the comb slot into the hair at the roots, with the edge of the teeth lightly touching the scalp.
- Draw the comb down from the roots to the ends of the hair with every stroke, and check the comb for lice each time – remove lice by wiping the comb with tissue paper or rinsing it.
- Work through the hair, section by section, so that the whole head of hair is combed through.
- Do this at least twice to help ensure you haven't missed any areas and continue until you find no more lice.

If you find head lice, you should check the rest of your family. Treat everyone found to have head lice on the same day. Some people advise that you do this regularly, about once a week.