

Oakfield Primary – Guidelines and Advice on Head Lice

Head louse infestation is not primarily a problem of schools but of the wider community. It cannot be solved by the school, but the school can help the local community to deal with it.

Head lice are only transmitted by direct, prolonged, head-to-head contact.

Transmission of lice within the classroom is relatively rare. When it does occur, it is usually from a “best friend”.

A sensible, informed approach, based on fact not mythology, will help to limit the problem.

At any one time, most schools will have children who have active infestation of head lice. The perception by parents, however, is often that there is a serious “outbreak” with many of the children infected. This is hardly ever the case.

What we will do:

- Provide information about head lice via our website or via information more regularly if many cases arise
- Keep individual cases confidential
- Encourage parents to seek advice from the School Nursing Service if they find head lice to be a problem
- Alert parents if an outbreak is noted

What we cannot do:

- Carry out routine head inspections
- Tell parents to keep children away from school because of head lice
- Exclude children who have, or are thought to have, head lice.

Parents/carers should:

- Regularly check to ensure your child/family is not affected
- Treat the whole family at the same time
- Inform the school, friends etc if your child has head lice
- Seek advice from a medical practitioner (pharmacist, school nurse, doctor) if the problem persists

ADVICE

Facts about head lice

- Head lice are tiny whitish to grey-brown insect, and smaller than the size of a pinhead when first hatched. When fully grown they're about the size of a sesame seed.

- 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. They look like dandruff but stick strongly to hair. Unlike dandruff, you cannot easily brush out nits.
- They can't fly, jump or swim and are spread from person to person, climbing swiftly along hair during close head to head contact
- Head lice are not harmful
- Head lice are easily missed in dry hair and do not necessarily cause itching. There are often only 10 lice on a head.
- Head lice infestation is common. Anyone with hair can get them, but children, who put their heads together a lot, tend to get them more often
- Head lice are not the result of dirty hair or poor hygiene. All types of hair can be affected, regardless of its length and condition.
- Head lice only affect humans and can't be passed on to animals or be caught from them.

Symptoms

It is possible to have head lice without symptoms, so it is best to take a look. Head lice often cause a person's scalp to itch. Itching isn't caused by biting but by an allergy to the lice. Even if someone with head lice is allergic to them, itching can take up to three months to develop. In some cases, a rash may appear on the back of the neck. This is caused by a reaction to lice droppings.

Detection

Head lice can't be prevented but regular checking ensures early detection and treatment if necessary. They are tiny and fast! They are difficult to find just by looking in the hair. Look behind ears, close to the scalp, at the back of the neck and under fringes. Adult head lice are 2 - 4 mm long, immature lice are even smaller.

If you suspect your child, or you yourself have head lice, it is best to do detection combing. Parents and carers should aim to check their children's hair once a week during hair washing. Remember that you are looking for living moving head lice - the only evidence that your child has a head lice infection.

Wet detection combing

Follow the steps below for wet detection combing.

- Wash hair using ordinary shampoo and apply plenty of conditioner. Use a 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 bevel-edge of the teeth lightly touching the scalp.
- Draw the comb down to the ends of the hair with every stroke, and check the comb for lice.
- Remove lice by wiping or rinsing the comb.
- Work methodically through the hair, section by section, so that the whole head of hair is combed through.
- Rinse out the conditioner and repeat the combing procedure in the wet hair.

Wet combing needs to be done regularly and can take a long time to do thoroughly.

Dry detection combing

Follow the steps below for dry detection combing:

- Use an ordinary comb to straighten and untangle the hair.
- Once the comb moves freely through the hair without dragging, switch to the louse detection comb. Comb the hair from the scalp to the ends, combing each section of hair three or four times before moving on to the next section.
- 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. This will stop the louse being repelled by static electricity as the comb is removed from the hair.
- Continue combing the hair section by section until the whole head has been combed through.

Lotions or sprays can be used as an alternative. However, to be totally effective they need to be applied correctly and thoroughly. Your pharmacist will be able to recommend an over the counter lotion or spray and give you advice about how to use it correctly.

You can be confident of an active infestation if you find a live louse in the hair. If you're still unsure, you can attach any lice you find to sticky tape and take it to your pharmacist, GP or practice nurse for confirmation.

Checking the rest of the family

If you discover head lice in your child's hair you should check the rest of the family and alert close friends.

You should only treat hair after live head lice have been found. Don't treat "just in case". However, once confirmed, take immediate steps to treat head lice.

Prevention

Check your child's hair weekly - don't wait for there to be symptoms. This is by far the best way to prevent head lice. Make it a weekly habit!

Please ensure that if your child has long hair it is tied back/up. There are a number of head lice prevention products available i.e. for kids, tea tree sprays etc.

Remember:

- If you find head lice, check and treat the whole family at the same time.
- Inform the school, baby-sitters, friends etc.
- Lice only live on human heads they will not live on bedding or clothes.
- They are only caught by head to head contact - they cannot jump or fly
- Head lice are not fussy about the length of hair or how clean it is.

If you require further support please contact the School Nursing Service on 023 8087 4537 where they can advise you on dealing with head lice.

For more detailed advice and information you may wish to visit the following website: www.nhs.uk

Useful websites for further information

www.onceaweektakeapeek.com

www.which.co.uk

<http://kidshealth.org/parents/infections>

<http://patient.info/health/head-lice-and-nits>

Common Myths

Nits prefer clean hair.

They are not bothered. Clean, dirty it's all the same to them! It's the hair and the scalp they go for, not the state it's in.

Nurses would reduce the problem.

They did not make any difference!

The head lice population was unaffected by the careers of hundreds of 'Nitty Noras'.

This is the nit season.

There is no nit season. Head lice like the warmth of the human head and there is not much change to scalp temperature between summer and winter. They are a year round phenomenon.

Adults do not get nits.

There is a bit of a truth behind this one. Head lice are less common in adults than children and more common in primary school than secondary school children but adults do get lice, as many teachers and parents can testify.

Nits make your head itchy.

Not always! Some people have nits but no itchiness - some children who have a long term nit problem seem to become almost immune to the sensation of itching.