

Information on HEAD LICE in Children

(Information from www.baby2kids.ie)

The mother of one of the children in our classroom has noticed nits in her child's hair. When this happens, we ask all parents to check their own child's hair. Head lice will spread rapidly in a class unless all affected children are promptly treated. Delay in identifying and treating all affected children can result in treated children rapidly becoming re-infected when they come into contact with others whose hair has not been treated.

The following notes may help you check and, if necessary, treat your child's hair.

What are head lice?

They are tiny greyish white insects that live in the hair and feed on the scalp. The female lays her eggs (the nits) on the hair close to the scalp. 7 to 10 days later the nits hatch and live 20 to 30 days, during which time the female can produce 250 to 300 eggs. The empty nits are white in colour. They remain firmly glued to the hair and become more obvious as the hair grows carrying them further from the scalp.

How could my child get head lice?

Anyone can pick up head lice. However, infestation is most common among children who often put heads together during play allowing the lice walk from one head to the next. Lice can also be passed indirectly through the common use of brushes, combs and hats. Head lice do not reflect standards of hygiene in the home or in the school. They are just as willing to live in clean hair as in an unclean head.

How will I know if my child has head lice?

Head scratching is usually the first sign that a child has head lice. By the time a child is consciously irritated by their presence, the lice will have been there for quite a while. It is better to check your child's hair on a regular basis. This should be done, using a special fine toothed comb (available from any chemist) and combing the hair carefully down onto a white towel or cloth. Adult lice can be removed in this way and will be seen as dark oval specks as they fall on to the towel. The hair should also be checked for the presence of nits, pearly grey specks smaller than a grain of caster

sugar. These are most commonly found at the nape of the neck and behind the ears. They stick firmly to the hair. If you see a white speck on the hair shaft, gently place the hair between two fingers and slide the fingers down along it. Dandruff or dust will readily come away. Nits stick and can be felt as the fingers pass over them.

What should I do if I find lice or nits?

A variety of effective preparations, shampoos and lotions, are available at the chemist it is important that the instructions are accurately followed. Shampoos kill the head lice but do not kill the eggs and thus must be used repeatedly until all hatched nits are killed. The lotions, applied correctly, kill the nits and the hatched lice. Nits remaining in the hair after a treatment programme such as this should be dead. However, to ensure that none have escaped, it is a good idea to wash the hair with one of the anti-head lice shampoos 7-10 days after the initial treatment. A solution of vinegar and water applied to the hair can help loosen the nits, which can then be removed using a fine toothed-nit removal comb.

Personal clothing, bed linens, and anything that might have become infested, should be washed in HOT water where possible. (The hot cycle of most washing machines is adequate). Brushes and combs should either be boiled for 10 minutes or soaked in a dilute bleach solution for 1 hour. As head lice pass rapidly from one family member to another it is a good idea to treat the whole family at the same time.