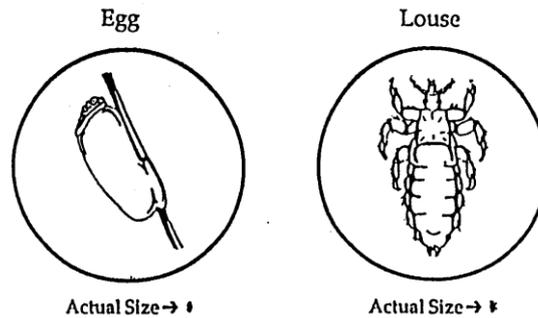


A public information leaflet about:

# Head Lice



Some advice about the prevention, recognition and treatment of headlice

(Norfolk Health Protection Unit working with the Norfolk Public Health Network  
January 2008)

## G645j Infection control Guidance Head Lice

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### What are head lice and how are they caught?

- Head lice are tiny insects, which can only live and breed in the warmth next to the scalp in human hair.
- Head lice are spread from one person to another when heads come into direct touching contact for a minute, or more.
- Head lice prefer clean to dirty hair and are found on adults as well as on children. Around a third of cases occur in adults.

### How can you recognise head lice?

- Head lice often don't cause any symptoms in the person on whose scalp they live – they may not be noticed.
- The lice only live for a week or two and their bodies or egg cases may be noticed by chance when combing the hair.
- A gritty powder, which is louse excrement, may be found on pillows or collars.
- An active head lice infestation is best confirmed by finding **live and moving insects**. For this use a *special detection comb (fine tooth comb)*. These are available cheaply from most pharmacies.

### What to do if you think there may be a problem?

- If someone in your household is known to have head lice, all members of the household should be carefully checked for head lice with a *special detection comb*. Anybody found to have live head lice in their hair should then have proper treatment. See the next section for details.
- Each affected person should remember all the people with whom they have had head-to-head contact lasting a minute or more, in the last month or so.
- These contacts can be then tactfully informed about the head lice problem so that they can check to see if they have head lice. Perhaps one of these leaflets could be passed on.

### How to treat head lice...

- The most effective method of getting rid of head lice is for the affected person to use a special insecticide preparation on two occasions, 7 days apart.
- These treatments are available direct from pharmacies, or on prescription from your GP. Creme rinses or lotions are more effective than shampoos. Always be sure to carefully follow manufacturer's instructions for use.

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- It is best that heads are inspected for **live and moving** head lice 2 to 3 days after completion of the second dose of treatment.
- Treatment does not remove dead egg cases etc. These will need to be combed out with a fine tooth comb (*detection comb*).

### **The Department of Health has recommended the ‘Wet Combing’ method as an alternative to using insecticides. Here’s how to do it ...**

- Shampoo the hair of the person with live head lice in the usual way and rinse. Leave the hair dripping wet.
- Apply lots of ordinary hair conditioner and gently massage it through the wet hair.
- Comb through with an *ordinary comb* to work the conditioner in thoroughly and to free any tangles (this will particularly help with both long and curly hair).
- Using a *fine toothed comb (detection comb)* - slot the comb into a section of hair with the teeth flat against the scalp. Keep the teeth lightly touching the scalp for as long as possible, drawing the comb down to the hair tips. If hair is very short it may help to comb from the hairline towards the crown. Check the comb between each stroke removing any lice captured by wiping onto kitchen paper.
- Work your way over the whole scalp, section by section, combing and cleaning until the *fine toothed comb* comes through louse free.
- If long hair is being treated, bowed over a sink, be sure to wash away any lice falling into the bowl to prevent them being mopped up again by the hair ends.
- Rinse conditioner off. Continue to comb whilst rinsing. At this point the hair should be extremely slippery, and the lice thoroughly wet, making it easier to remove them with the comb.
- Wrap hair in towel (do not rub dry). Leave the hair dripping wet.
- The next stage is usually best done sitting upright.
- Comb out any tangles with an *ordinary comb* and then repeat the section by section combing with the *fine toothed comb* until it comes out ‘louse free’.
- Dry and style as usual.
- This process needs to be repeated twice weekly until no further live head lice are detected.

Normally, this will involve at least four treatments during a period of a fortnight.

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- After the head lice are eradicated, it might be worth routinely checking scalps for head lice, perhaps after each hair washing.

### **Further Advice...**

- Further advice and information about head lice is available from your:-
  - local pharmacist
  - surgery
  - school nurse
- You can also get information about this, and a wide range of other health topics, from **NHS Direct on 0845 4647**