

Head lice management - FAQs



Quite often during head lice outbreaks, teachers will be approached by dedicated parents who are frustrated that their child continually gets head lice even though they are being treated. The following information about head lice management may provide further advice for teachers when responding to commonly asked questions from parents:

Can you remove a child with head lice from class?

No. Schools cannot remove children from class who have head lice. Treating head lice is a health issue and parents are responsible for the health of their children.

Schools rely on parents to inform the school of the condition so that the whole school community, including teachers, can detect and treat head lice when the condition arises.

I keep treating my child's hair, but the head lice keep returning. Why isn't the treatment working?

It is very frustrating when you are doing everything that is recommended and nothing seems to work. Some possible reasons for this may include:

- only one treatment has been applied with no follow up treatment. Even if the lice are killed or removed, the eggs will continue to hatch after the first treatment
- the head lice are resistant to chemical treatments
- poor application of the product
- the product hasn't been applied to all hairs, from the roots to the tips.
- the chemical product hasn't been in contact with the head lice for the right amount of time
- there is a new outbreak of head lice.

It is recommended that EVERYONE in the family is checked ONCE A WEEK.

By checking every week you will be able to manage a new head lice condition easily with conditioner and combing because you have caught the condition early and there will be fewer lice present.

I can't afford to keep buying head lice treatments. Is there a cheaper solution?

Conditioner and combing using a head lice comb is the most effective way of finding head lice and is cheaper than chemical treatments.

It is also an effective way of treating head lice, particularly mild conditions.

The conditioner stuns the lice for some minutes so they can be easily removed.

It also avoids the use of head lice chemicals, which are insecticides.

Conditioner and combing is easy for older children to learn to do for themselves.

Using conditioner and combing every two days between chemical treatments removes young lice as they hatch from the eggs.

Are chemical treatments safe to use?

Chemical treatments are only safe when they are used as directed on the label. Overuse can damage the scalp.

Chemical treatments are insecticides, which are poisons, and need to be used with caution.

Check for safety warnings about pregnancy, breast feeding and young children. If you have any questions about safety, check with your pharmacist.

Many chemicals can be absorbed through the skin.

Any chemical treatment may cause allergy or irritation. Discuss any concerns about side effects with your pharmacist.

Should I use chemical treatments to try to prevent head lice?

No. Chemical treatments should not be used to prevent head lice.

Chemical treatments do not repel head lice and no chemical treatment will kill eggs. The eggs will continue to hatch after the treatment.

A chemical treatment should only be used when you actually find head lice. This avoids unnecessary exposure to chemicals.

I've tried lots of different head lice treatments and they don't work. Why not?

Resistance to chemical treatments is a problem in Australia. Research into this problem is continuing. The only way of dealing with resistance is to check for effectiveness every time you use a chemical treatment.

If chemical products don't work or you have concerns about their use, conditioner and combing can be an effective treatment if used every 2 days until no head lice are found for 10 consecutive days.

Seek advice from your local pharmacist regarding head lice treatment options and head lice combs.

I'm spending hours washing my children's clothes, sheets and pillow cases but they keep getting head lice. Why isn't this working?

Head lice can only be spread from one person to another by direct head-to-head contact.

They are not transmitted via sheets, pillows, hats or carpets.

Head lice can only survive on human heads. They must feed every six hours or they will die from dehydration.

Head lice need close head-to-head contact to spread from one person to another.

Time would be better spent detecting and treating lice rather than frequently washing clothes and bed linen.

How can I reduce the risk of my child getting head lice?

Discourage children from sharing their brushes and combs.

Discourage head to head contact.

Keep long hair tied up.