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Back to school: how to check your child for head lice and nits

Head lice and nits are dreaded words for many parents, but they are very common in young children. According to the British Association of Dermatologists, the beginning of the autumn school term is when they are most likely to start. So if your child comes home from school with an itchy head, how can you check that these bugs are the cause?

What is the difference between head lice and nits?

Head lice are tiny insects that feed on blood from the human scalp and can attach to the hair. Nits are the small brown or white eggs left in the hair by lice.

Head lice are spread by head-to-head contact, but aren't a sign of poor hygiene or an unclean home. Lice don't carry viruses or bacterial diseases.

Although you can't prevent head lice, you can stop them from spreading by getting rid of them quickly.

What are the signs your child has head lice?

Head lice can make the head feel itchy or as if something is moving in the hair. However, the only way to be sure your child has lice is to comb through the hair to find the insects or their eggs.

You can do this using a special, fine-toothed comb – available online or in pharmacies or supermarkets – which will pick up the lice if they are there.

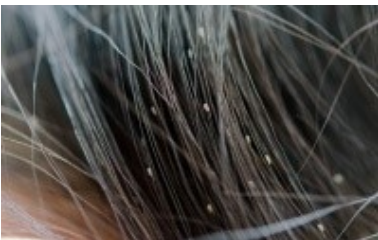


How to check your child for head lice and nits

Head lice are small insects that are up to 3 mm long. **Nits** - lice eggs - look like small yellow or brown dots. They're often found on the hair close to the scalp, where the temperature is higher and keeps them warm before they hatch.

Using a head lice-detection comb, part the hair and check for eggs or lice. This can be easier to do if the hair is wet.

Lice eggs hatch up to two weeks after they are laid. After hatching, the remaining egg shell looks white or clear and stays attached to the hair.



How to get rid of head lice

If you find **lice** or nits, you should treat them quickly.

Try wet combing the hair

Wash the hair with normal shampoo, rinse and apply lots of conditioner. Then, thoroughly comb the hair from the roots to the ends using the fine-toothed comb. You can buy combs especially for this purpose - such as the Nitty Gritty.

When wet combing, check the comb for **lice** or eggs after every stroke and remove them by rinsing or wiping the comb.

If you are combing dry hair, you'll need to look for live lice as you comb, and trap any using your thumb as you pull the comb out.

You should check all members of your household for head lice with this combing method.

Use medicated shampoos

You can buy medicated shampoos – such as Hedrin and sprays – such as Full Marks from pharmacies and supermarkets to kill head lice. Some products come with a comb to remove dead lice and eggs once you've used the shampoo or lotion.

It's important to read the instructions as some medicated treatments may need to be repeated to ensure all the lice are eliminated.

You may want to avoid these products if your child has [sensitive skin](#) or [allergies](#) to certain chemicals or ingredients.

Always read the packaging as some insecticides aren't recommended for children under two years old, [pregnant](#) or [breastfeeding](#) women or people with [eczema](#) or [asthma](#).

Remember the whole family will need to be treated to make sure everyone is free of nits and lice.

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Originally Published: 20/11/2023	Next review date: 30/08/2023	Document ID: doc_32196

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