

# Managing head lice in primary schools using a health promoting schools approach

*From the Head Lice in Primary Schools Kit*

In this presentation the following will  
be discussed:

what are head lice?  
detection  
treatment  
where can I get help?  
our school's commitment to managing  
head lice

# What are head lice?

*Head lice:*

are tiny egg laying insects

can only survive on human heads

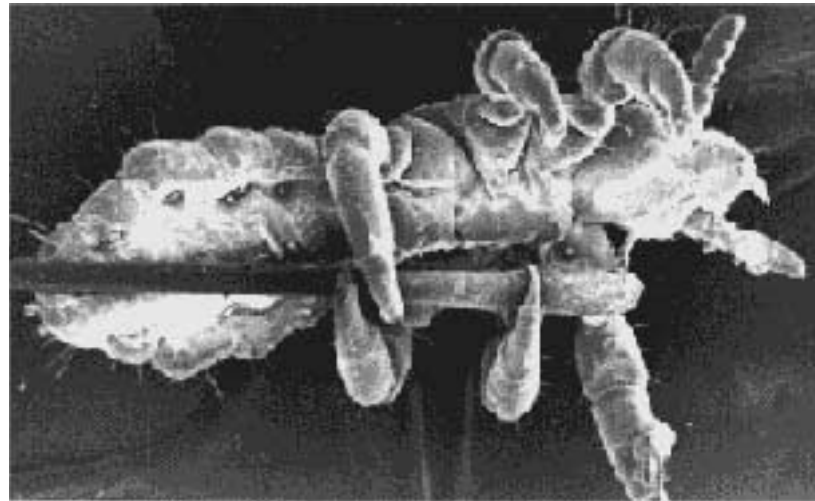
grow to about 3.5mm (the size of a sesame seed or pinhead)

have no wings, so they cannot fly

have 6 legs with strong claws which are designed for holding tightly onto hair - these claws also prevent the lice from jumping - **HEAD LICE DO NOT JUMP!!**

are a nuisance NOT a health hazard

Figure A: A head louse using its powerful claws to grasp a hair shaft



Source: Sally Speare and Rick Speare ©, School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, James Cook University, Townsville, 1998.

# The Life Cycle of a Head Louse

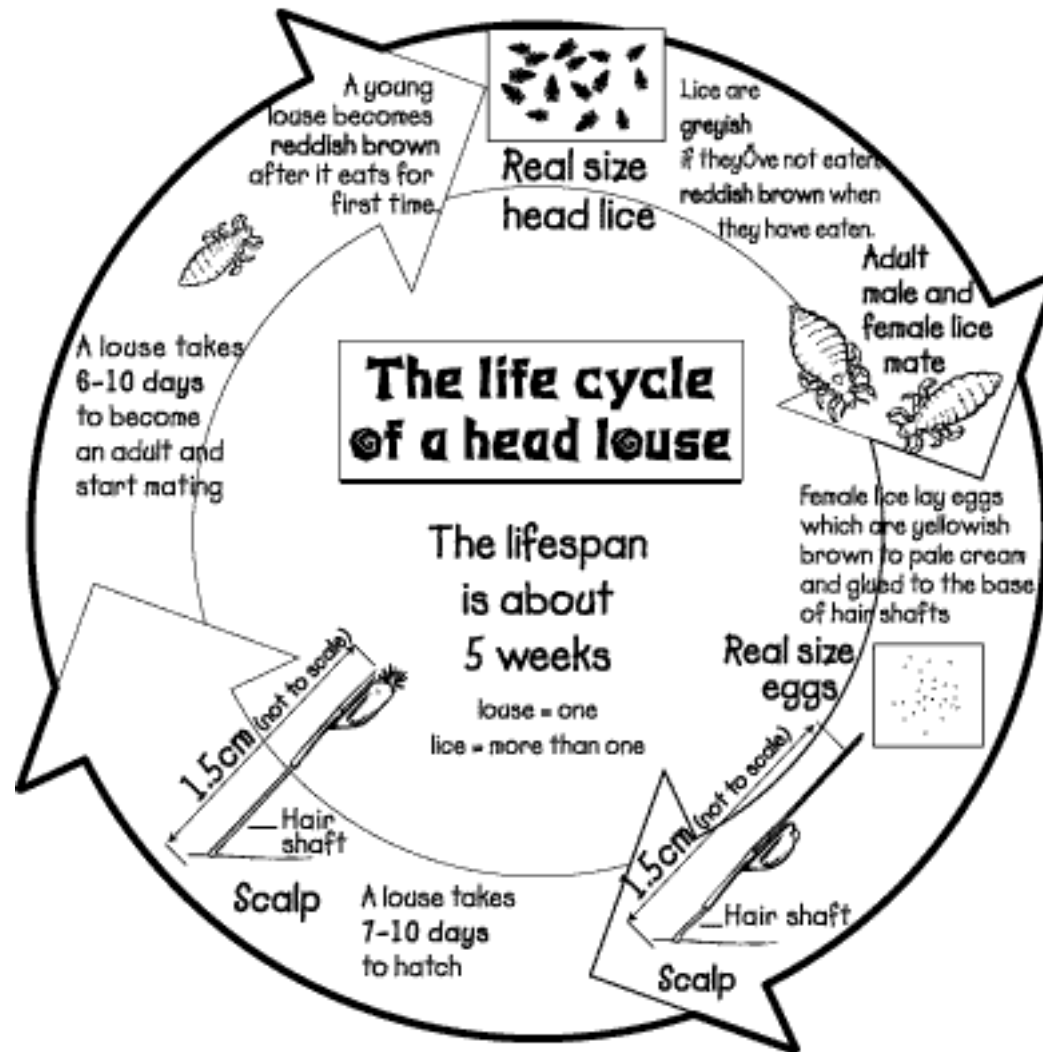
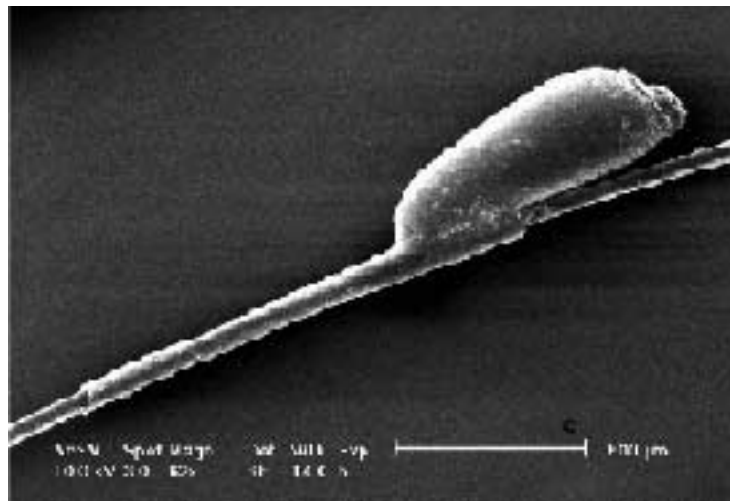


Figure B: Head lice eggs on hair and head louse on fingernail



Photo courtesy of Foundation Studios

Figure C: Live unhatched head louse egg attached to a hair shaft



Source: Sally Speare and Rick Speare©, School of Public Health and Tropical  
Medicine, James Cook University, Townsville, 1998

# How do head lice move from one head to another?

Head lice are like trapeze artists - they swing from hair to hair using their strong claws.

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

Electrostatic charge from combing dry hair can fling head lice up to 1 metre.

Only the young lice and adult lice can move from one head to another.

# Who gets head lice?

We can ALL get head lice.

They have no preference for particular groups.

Young children attract them more easily because of head-to-head contact during play.

Adults can get head lice from children and can re-infect children.

# Detection of head lice

Early detection helps to break the head lice cycle and enables effective management to start as soon as possible. Many people do not know they have head lice and do not know how to find them.

# Do I have head lice?

Itching is not always a reliable sign of head lice.

They can be difficult to see if looking at the hair while it is dry.

Eggs may be easier to see, but are only important if they are found 1.5cm from the scalp.

Conditioner and combing is the only proven reliable way of detecting head lice.

# The conditioner and combing technique is:

the most effective way of detecting head lice.

AND

is also an effective way of treating head lice

for mild head lice conditions

when chemicals are not effective due to resistance

when a cheaper option is preferred

to avoid the use of chemicals (insecticides)

for children to learn and do themselves under adult supervision

in between chemical treatments - use every 2 days to  
remove young lice as they hatch from the eggs

# Conditioner and combing

A suitable technique for detection and/or treatment

1. Untangle dry hair with an ordinary comb.
2. Apply the hair conditioner to dry hair. The conditioner works by stunning the lice and this happens best when the conditioner is thick. Use enough conditioner to thoroughly cover the whole scalp and all hair from the roots to tips.
3. Use the ordinary comb to evenly distribute conditioner and divide the hair into four or more sections using hair clips. A mirror helps if combing yourself.
4. Change to a head lice comb.
5. Start with a section at the back of the head. Place the teeth of the head lice comb flat against the scalp.

# Conditioner and combing

A suitable technique for detection and/or treatment

7. Wipe the comb on a tissue/material after each stroke. In good light, check for head lice and eggs. A magnifying glass will help. Adult lice are easier to see - newly hatched young lice are difficult to see. You may see some eggs.
8. Comb each section twice until you have combed the whole head. If the comb becomes clogged, use an old toothbrush, dental floss or a safety pin to remove the head lice/eggs.
9. If you find head lice or eggs, decide on a treatment option.
10. If you choose the conditioner and combing as a treatment, keep combing the whole head until all the hair conditioner is gone.
11. Repeat the conditioner and combing technique every 2 days until you find no more live head lice for 10 consecutive days. You will be removing all the adult lice and any young lice that hatch from the eggs.

# Treatment options

It is recommended that you use:

The conditioner and combing technique as treatment alone

OR

The conditioner and combing technique in between the use of a chemical treatment

It is essential to check for effectiveness after each application of a chemical product. Some head lice are resistant to some chemical products

# Using Chemical Treatments

Use only chemicals designed to treat head lice.

Apply chemical only if you actually find head lice.

Cover the child's eyes.

Apply product to dry hair.

Apply product thoroughly to scalp and all hair from roots to tips.

Comb through to spread evenly. Comb several times if hair is long.

Leave product in the hair for the time recommended by the manufacturer.

Check for effectiveness

# Choosing a chemical treatment

Two most important things to think about when choosing and using chemical treatments are safety and effectiveness.

- Choose only chemical treatments designed specifically to treat head lice
  - Choose only chemical treatments which have an "Aust L" or "Aust R" number on the label.
- Chemical treatments are grouped according to the active ingredient.
  - If you use a chemical treatment and it does not kill the head lice, choose a product with a different active ingredient. (use a Personal Record to keep track)

# The four groups and some chemical treatments currently available

Table of Products approved in Australia by the Therapeutic Goods Administration

Active Ingredient	Product Names
<b>1. Pyrethrins</b>	Amcal Head Lice Foam Banlice Mousse Delva Formula PCT Lyban Foam Meditox Foam Pyrenel Pyrifoam Lotion
<b>2. Synthetic Pyrethroids</b>	Orange Medic Orange Medic Plus Paralice Pyrifoam Head Lice Treatment Quellada Creme Rinse Quellada Head Lice Treatment
<b>3. Organophosphates</b>	Cleensheen Exolice Medicated Foam HL 7 HLT KP24 Foam KP24 Lotion Lice Rid LX Medicated Foam
<b>4. Combinations Herbal &amp; Essential Oils</b>	Herba Lice Herbs for Headlice Lice Attack Lice Blaster New Improved Lysout Gel Lysout Spray Natural Head Lice Treatment Neutra Lice Quit Nits Natural Head Lice Treatment Sunspirit Aromatherapy Lice Scents to Kill Tea Tree Lice Foam Wild Child All Natural Head Lice Treatment

# Checking for effectiveness

After the chemical product has been on the head for the recommended time and before washing it off:

- use a fine tooth comb to comb all of the hairs from roots to tips;
- if the chemical product has dried, apply some water to moisten the hair;
- after each sweep, wipe the combings onto a tissue;
- repeat until all hair has been done at least twice;
- wait 5 minutes for the head lice to dry off;
- observe the lice for movement and decide if the treatment has been effective or not.

# If the product is effective?

- The product you have used is effective if all the lice are dead.
- Apply the same product every 7 days (maximum 3 times) to kill the lice hatching from the eggs.
- Use the conditioner and combing technique every 2 days in between to improve the effectiveness of the treatment.

# If the product is NOT effective?

- The treatment product that you have used is ineffective if some lice run around or wave their legs and antennae.
- You will need to select a product with a **different active ingredient**.
- Show the pharmacist your head lice record and request advice on choosing an alternative treatment.

# Where can I get help?

- School head lice support volunteer
  - School principal
  - School administration officer
- Community participation officer
  - Parent liaison officer
  - School health nurse
  - Local pharmacist
- Other parents within the school

# Our school's commitment to managing head lice

Our school is committed to managing head lice and uses the strategies outlined in the **Head Lice in Primary Schools Kit**

including:

- sending the **Managing head lice at home package** home to all families at the beginning of each school year
- sending home **alert notices** when an outbreak occurs within the school
  - provision of a head lice support volunteer
  - regular school newsletter announcements
  - head lice in the school curriculum
- ensuring all school staff are aware of how the school manages the issue of head lice

Head lice *CAN* be managed if  
we all work together to detect  
and treat these pests!!

### REMEMBER:

- ★ check weekly
- ★ treat quickly
- ★ tell the school