

# Head lice and nits

Head lice and nits are very common in young children and their families.

They don't have anything to do with dirty hair and are picked up by head-to-head contact.

## Check if it's head lice



Head lice are small insects, up to 3mm long, and can be difficult to spot

Head lice eggs (nits) are brown or white (empty shells) and attached to the hair

### Head lice can make your head feel:

- Itchy or like something is moving in your hair

**The only way to be sure someone has head lice is by finding live lice.**

You can do this by combing their hair with a special fine-toothed comb (detection comb). You can buy these online, at a pharmacy or pound shop.

## How to get rid of head lice

### Important

You can treat head lice without seeing a GP.

Treat head lice as soon as you spot them.

You should check everyone in the house and start treating anyone who has head lice on the same day.

There's no need to keep your child off school if they have head lice.

## Wet combing

Lice and nits can be removed by wet combing. You should try this method first. You can buy a special fine-toothed comb (detection comb) online or from pharmacies to remove head lice and nits.

There may be instructions on the pack, but usually you:

- wash hair with ordinary shampoo
- apply lots of conditioner (any conditioner will do)
- comb the whole head of hair, from the roots to the ends

It usually takes about 10 minutes to comb short hair, and 20 to 30 minutes for long, frizzy or curly hair.

Do wet combing on days 1, 5, 9 and 13 to catch any newly hatched head lice. Check again that everyone's hair is free of lice on day 17.

For more information about wet combing, see the [Community Hygiene Concern website](#) or the [NHS website](#)

## Medicated lotions and sprays

Ask your pharmacist for advice if you have tried wet combing for 17 days, but your child still has live head lice.

## You can't prevent head lice

There's nothing you can do to prevent head lice.

You can help stop them spreading by wet or dry combing regularly to catch them early.

Do not use medicated lotions and sprays to prevent head lice. They can irritate the scalp.

There's no need for children to stay off school or to wash laundry on a hot wash.