

### **What do I do if my child has head lice?**

It has been brought to my attention that there may be head lice in the school again. Please ensure that all hair is tied up in school. Please find below some information regarding head lice taken from HSE Manual "Infection in School, A Manual for School Personnel".

#### **Head Lice**

There has been a case of Head Lice in your child's classroom and your child may have been exposed. Head Lice can spread rapidly within a school unless all affected children are treated promptly. If all affected children are not treated quickly then other children that have already been treated could pick Head Lice up again.

#### **What are Head Lice?**

They are tiny greyish white insects that live in the hair and feed on the scalp. The female lays the eggs (the nits) on the hair close to the scalp. 7 to 10 days later the nits hatch and live for 20 to 30 days. The female can produce 250 to 300 eggs. The empty nits are white in colour. They remain firmly glued to the hair and become more obvious as the hair grows.

#### **How could my child get Head Lice?**

Anyone can pick up Head Lice. They are most common among children as they often put heads together during play allowing the lice walk from one head to the next. Lice can also be passed indirectly by using someone else's hairbrush, combs or hats. Head lice do not reflect standards of hygiene in the home or in the school. They are just as willing to live in clean or dirty hair.

#### **How will I know if my child has Head Lice?**

Head scratching is usually the first sign that a child has head lice. By the time a child begins scratching their head the lice have been there for quite awhile. It is better to check your child's hair regularly. You can do this using a special fine-toothed comb (available from any chemist). You should comb the hair carefully down onto a white towel or cloth. Adult lice can be removed in this way and will be seen as dark oval specks as they fall onto the towel. The hair should also be checked for the presence of nits, these are pearly grey specks smaller than a grain of caster sugar. They are most commonly found around the nape of the neck and behind the ears. They stick firmly to the hair. If you see a white speck on the hair shaft, gently place the hair between two fingers and slide the fingers down along it. Dandruff or dust will come away easily. Nits stick and can be felt as the fingers pass over them.

#### **What should I do if I find lice or nits?**

There are a number effective preparations, shampoos and lotions available at the chemist. It is important that the instructions are followed carefully. Shampoos kill the head lice but do not kill the eggs and must be used repeatedly until all hatched nits are killed. Lotions will kill the nits and hatched lice if they are used correctly.

Nits remaining in the hair after a treatment such as this should be dead. You can ensure that none have escaped by washing the hair with one of the anti-head lice shampoos 7 to 10 days after the initial treatment. Getting rid of the nits is difficult, a solution of vinegar and water applied to the hair helps loosen the nits which can then be removed using a fine-toothed nit removal comb. Personal clothing, bed linens, and anything that might have become infested, should be washed in hot water where possible. Brushes and combs should either be boiled for 10 minutes or soaked in a dilute bleach solution for 1 hour. As head lice pass rapidly from one family member to another it is a good idea to treat the whole family at the same time. Your doctor or chemist will be able to answer any further questions that you might have about head lice and the available lotions and shampoos.