

Pro_037	Head Lice
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Responsibilities and delegations		
Version	Date approved	Date for review
2020/2	February 2023	February 2025
This policy applies to	All Staff	
Policy approval	Quality & Risk Committee	

Policy

This Policy provides guidance for Life Choice support workers to be able to assist participants who may have or have been in contact with someone who has a head lice infestation. It provides general knowledge, signs and symptoms and treatment options available.

Head lice:

- Are small wingless insects that live on the human head or hair, feeding on human blood several times a day
- Are common, particularly in children.
- Cannot fly, jump or swim and are spread by head to head contact
- Are not dangerous and do not carry disease
- Are not the result of dirty hair or poor hygiene and it can affect all types of hair irrespective of its condition or length.
- Infestation effects only humans and cannot be passed on to animals.
- Are rarely transferred through clothing, hats, furniture or bedding. Lice or eggs may be attached to strands of hair left on pillows, bedding or furniture, but this is uncommon

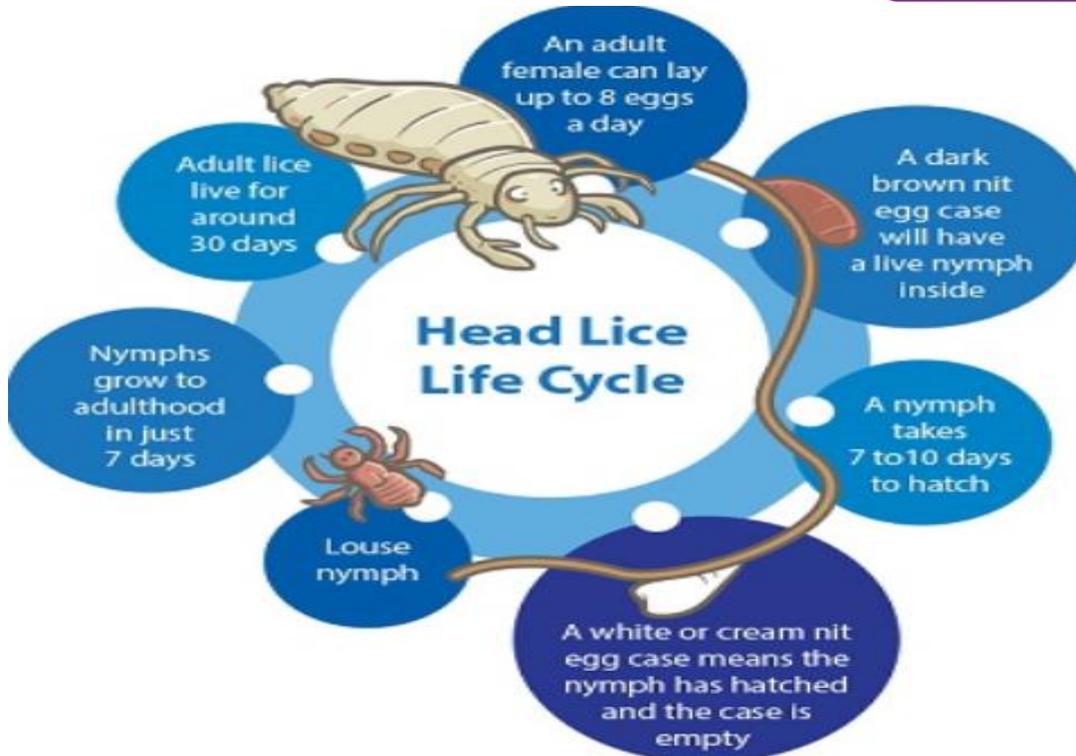
Head Lice - Life Cycle

Female head louse lays eggs close to the scalp on the hair shaft and relies on the warmth of the head to hatch.

Eggs hatch after 5-7days leaving empty egg shells (nits) glued to the hair shaft. These eggshells are more noticeable as hair grows and carry them away from the scalp. They are about the size of a small flake of dandruff and cannot be easily shaken or brushed out.

Nymphs that emerge from egg shells take 7-8 days to grow to adult sized lice.

They may take another 7 days to start breeding and hence it is important to remove them to stop them spreading.



Signs and Symptoms:

The first signs that the participant may have head lice is a tickling feeling in the hair, frequent scalp itchiness or sores/scabs on the scalp from scratching. It is important to be aware that the itching may not be immediate and, in some cases, it can take weeks before the participant will start to complain.

Although very small, a single adult louse can be seen and is about the size of a sesame seed. They usually look like tan or brown dots.

Unless the infestation is heavy, it is more likely that you will see nits in the participant's hair, rather than lice crawling around. A good method of checking the participant's head is by parting the hair in small sections and checking for lice and nits with a fine-tooth comb close to the scalp, behind the ears, and around the nape of the neck. Good lighting and magnifying glass may help this process.

If you are still unsure, and the participant is constantly itching and complaining, speak to a health care provider or pharmacist.

Procedures

Lice are transmitted via the contact route therefore contact precautions should be taken by all staff when caring for a participant who has a lice infestation.

- Plastic aprons and disposable gloves should be worn when in direct contact with the participant or the participant's immediate environment and hand hygiene should be performed regularly.
- If providing treatment for head lice, dispose of all paper towel used to wipe comb on to in the general waste bin.

Head lice are only found on the human head or hair. Head lice do not live on furniture, hats, bedding, carpet or anywhere else in the environment. There is no benefit in washing them as a treatment option. They quickly dehydrate and die if removed from the head.

Treatment

There are two main treatment options to remove head lice both of which should be explained to the participant and verbal consent obtained prior to commencing treatment.

- mechanical removal
- chemical removal.

Mechanical removal

This method is an effective method to remove head lice. It does not contribute to insecticide resistance in head lice and also presents a low risk of skin irritation.

Equipment required:

- Normal comb to detangle hair prior to using metal lice comb
- Fine toothed metal lice comb (available from the chemist)
- Conditioner - buy a cheap brand as you will be needing a lot of it, and preferably one that is white to make spotting the lice easier
- White paper towel

- Mechanical removal involves applying conditioner to dry hair.
- Apply liberal amounts of conditioner to the scalp and massage it through all the hair shafts. Every hair has to be coated to ensure it reaches the lice.
- Lice live close to the scalp, so make sure that you cover the hair shaft close to the scalp.
- After you've applied the conditioner, use a large comb to part small sections of the hair starting from the nape and working upwards toward the crown.
- Using a fine long toothed metal lice comb, comb through the hair in sections.
- Take care not to use excessive pressure or force when combing

Eggs are often found behind the ears and toward the back of the head. By using this method, you are more likely to find the head lice on top of and toward the front of the head.

- After each comb out, wipe the conditioner on the paper towel. If the participant has head lice, you will see them on the towel
- Keep combing each section of hair until no further lice, nymphs or eggs appear on the paper towel. You may see lots of old egg casings that may take a while to remove
- Once you have combed and recomb each section of hair, wash out the conditioner
- Simply clean the comb with hot soapy water and rinse off with hot water.

The conditioner does not kill lice but stuns them for about 20 minutes enabling easier removal. The long-toothed metal comb will remove nits and the stunned head lice.

- This method should be done every second or third day until no nits and lice remain, usually about 7 to 10 days.

Chemical removal

- If you prefer to use chemical treatment, make sure that the heads you treat are infested with head lice.
- Registered chemical treatments that contain insecticides to kill lice are usually safe, but excessive use of other substances, such as home remedies and other insecticides, can cause irritation. Speak to your local pharmacist to identify the registered treatments that are safe for you and the participant.
- Always read the product label before applying and use as directed.
- Avoid chemical treatment on any scalp that is irritated or inflamed.
- Protect the participants eyes when treating with any product.

Equipment required:

- Normal comb to detangle hair prior to using metal lice comb
- Chemical treatment containing synthetic or natural insecticides that kill head lice (talk to your local pharmacist to identify the treatments containing insecticides)
- Fine toothed metal lice comb (available from the chemist)
- White paper towel

If you choose to use a chemical treatment, remember to follow the instructions carefully.

You will also need to comb through the hair to ensure the treatment is working. If you find dead lice it means the product has worked. If you find live lice, the treatment has not worked.

Don't be tempted to re-apply or over-apply the same chemical if it doesn't appear to be working. Instead switch to another treatment that uses a different chemical compound or use the mechanical removal method.

- **No chemical treatment kills all the eggs**
- **It is very important that you repeat the chemical treatment in seven days to kill any newly hatched eggs**
- **Do not apply the treatment more than once per week as more frequent applications could lead to scalp problems and have little or no effect.**

Once the participant is free of lice and nits, remember to regularly check with a fine-toothed head lice comb and conditioner as described above.

You can help to reduce transmission of head lice by tying hair back or braiding and by checking your participants hair regularly.

There is no preventative treatment available for head lice. Treating the whole family with chemical treatment as a precaution contributes to head lice becoming resistant to the products used.

Early detection and treatment will prevent re-infestation of other family members and housemates. Educate the participant about how head lice are transferred from one person to another and to avoid head to head contact with others.

Documentation

- Staff should document head lice infestation and treatment method used in participant's file so that follow up treatments are repeated in the appropriate time periods due to the life cycle of head lice.

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