

Head Lice/Kutu facts and Wet Combing

Public Health Nursing Service



child health

he whakaaritanga hauora koreutu mo nga tamariki katoa

☀️ Head lice are small flat insects 2-3 mm long that live in the hair where they breed and feed 5-6 times a day on the blood from the scalp. Head lice breed throughout the year and can be caught by anyone, although are more commonly found in the hair of children as their hair is finer and thinner, allowing head lice to grasp it.

☀️ Head lice hang onto the hair with hook-like claws at the end of each leg; they cannot fly, jump or live on animals but crawl from head to head during close contact. They may also be spread from sharing hats, head gear, combs or brushes and will remain on the hair after swimming or bathing/showering.

☀️ They do not cause other diseases.

☀️ They live up to 40 days on the human scalp and although they can survive for 2 days away from the human scalp they are unlikely to reproduce. A female louse can lay up to 100 nits (eggs) in her lifetime. Nits look like small, whitish/pale grey specks about the size of a pin head and are glued to the hair shaft. Nits are laid very close to the scalp and grow out with the hair shaft; they can be very difficult to remove, unlike dandruff, which moves easily off the hair shaft.

☀️ Nits hatch after 7-10 days and mature lice can live for 40 days.

☀️ After hatching the nit is white and once 1 cm away from the scalp they are usually dead or empty shells.

☀️ What to look for

- Small red/brown or grey insects and tiny whitish/pale grey eggs attached to the hair shaft close to the scalp (the eggs are easier to see than the louse).
- Tickling feeling in the hair, unusual itching/scratching of the head and neck.
- Small red marks on the scalp, neck or behind the ears (head lice bites).

☀️ What to do

- In good light check through the hair and scalp of all household members (adults may have no symptoms). Divide the hair into small sections and use a fine toothed comb to work through the hair.
- **Only treat if insects and/or eggs are found.**
- **Treat everyone who is infected on the same day.**

☀️ How do you treat head lice?

- Because eggs hatch after 7-10 days it is important to continue wet combing treatment for a minimum of three weeks to break the breeding cycle.
- Wet combing does not need to be expensive but to be effective **instructions need to be followed.**

☀ Other tips

- Brush hair every day — when lice are injured they are unlikely to reproduce.
- Use your own brush, comb, hat, headgear, and tie long hair back.
- Check all family members' hair weekly.
- Soak hair brushes and combs in hot water for 10 minutes each week.
- Wet comb once weekly for early detection.
- As head lice can live off the hair for up to 24 hours hot wash and/or dry bed linen and towels and vacuum.
- Discuss treatment options with your Public Health Nurse, Chemist or Doctor.
- Only use insecticide products designed for human use and prescribed by your doctor or pharmacist.

To ensure effectiveness, whatever treatment you decide to use follow the instructions carefully, as combining wet combing and insecticide treatment methods may reduce the effectiveness of either method.

HEAD TO HEAD CONTACT MAY CAUSE RE-INFESTATION EVEN IF TREATMENT HAS BEEN THOROUGH

☀ Wet combing

Method of head lice treatment

NOTE: This method will break the head lice/kutu cycle and will only work if instructions are followed carefully for three weeks. Continue until no evidence of live lice/kutu are found.

☀ USE THIS METHOD EVERY 3rd DAY ☀

1. Wash hair with shampoo and rinse.
2. Apply plenty of conditioner, do **NOT** rinse out, leave hair wet, lice/kutu are less able to move in wet hair. (Do not towel dry; however a towel over the shoulders may be more comfortable).
3. Use a clean hair brush or broad toothed (grooming) comb to remove tangles.

(Hair brushes and combs can be treated by soaking in **HOT** water for 10 minutes every time they are used while head lice are present).

4. Divide hair into sections and fasten off the hair that is not being worked on at this time (as hairdressers do).
5. Work systematically through each section of hair using a fine-toothed comb. Starting with the teeth of the comb touching the scalp at the hair roots, slowly slide the comb through to the end of the hair. Depending on the degree of infestation this process could take an hour or more.
6. Clean comb on a tissue, paper towel, cloth or rinse in running water to remove any lice/kutu, nits/eggs or skin flakes.
7. Repeat till all sections have been fine-tooth combed.
8. Rinse conditioner off hair then dry in usual way.



**Continue daily hair brushing both night and morning.
Check for head lice weekly.**

NIT KIT CHECK LIST

1. Wash hair, apply conditioner.
2. Comb with fine-toothed comb.
3. Repeat procedure every one to three days for a minimum of three weeks.

Day 1	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Day 3	<input type="checkbox"/>	FINISHED WEEK 1
Day 6	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Day 9	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Day 12	<input type="checkbox"/>	FINISHED WEEK 2
Day 15	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Day 18	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Day 21	<input type="checkbox"/>	FINISHED WEEK 3
Day 24	<input type="checkbox"/>	