

COWAN PUBLIC SCHOOL

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Alert Notice The School Has Been Notified of HEAD LICE Please Check Your Child/Children's Hair

- Head lice are extremely contagious and should be treated immediately.
- We are asking all parents to check their child's hair. **It is extremely important for you to check your child's head for head lice TODAY.** Keep checking every 2 days until there are no head lice found for 10 consecutive days.
- If you do find head lice, commence effective treatment immediately and be sure to complete the process of treatment.
- You may find the most recent advice from the NSW Department of Health Guide helpful.

Head Lice - are they your worst nightmare?

Who gets head lice? Anyone can get head lice. It is common that once children get their heads together they may bring home some 6-legged friends. Current statistics through NSW Health Nitbusters Programme indicates 23% of children have had lice regardless of their background or how clean they are. It takes only 1 child with head lice to infect the whole class!

What are head lice? Head lice are small, wingless, egg laying parasites that live on the human head by feeding and sucking blood from the scalp. They can't fly or jump so to move from head to head they grasp a hair shaft and swing. Head lice do not burrow into the skin, however, they do need to feed on human blood several times a day. They do not survive for very long off the human head.

What about eggs? Eggs (often called nits) are laid by a female approximately 1.5cm from the scalp, on the hair shaft. Each female can lay about 100 eggs in their 1-month lifespan. The eggs are attached to the hair shaft with incredibly strong glue. About 5-7 days after being laid a small nymph emerges from the egg and starts to feed. It is about 14 days after the eggs are laid that the mature louse starts to breed.

How do I know my child has head lice? Detecting head lice can be a simple process by applying white hair conditioner (white makes it easier to see the lice) to dry hair. Conditioner works by stunning the head lice for 20 minutes and by making it hard for the lice to grip the hair. Apply the conditioner, comb through the hair section 5 times and keep combing each section of hair until not further lice, nymphs or eggs appear on the tissue. Remember to apply the conditioner behind the ears, at the base of the skull and toward the crown because this is where lice love to lay their eggs. All members of the family should be checked once per week using this method and your child's teacher should be notified so that others can check.

How do I treat head lice? If head lice are found repeat the conditioner and combing method every second day to remove the nymphs as they hatch. Continue until no live lice are found for 10 consecutive days. Insecticides (available from pharmacies) can be used strictly as per the manufacturer's directions. If choosing this method it is important to repeat the treatment 7 days after the initial treatment to kill all the nymphs hatched from eggs. Do not use common insecticides, mentholated spirits or kerosene. Use insecticides only if live lice are found on the head as misuse may contribute to the problem of resistance. There is no need to spring-clean the whole house, car and school. Soak combs, brushes and hair accessories in hot water (>50°C) for 10 minutes to kill any lice. Wash bed linen, towels, clothes and hats in hot water or place in hot clothes dryer for 15 minutes. Place any items that can't be washed in a sealed plastic bag for a minimum of 4 days.

Where can I get more information about head lice?

Go to www.health.nsw.gov.au or www.health.qld.gov.au

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