

Head lice horrors

It's a proud moment enjoyed by all the family, the home snapped photos of your child standing with new bag in hand, crisp uniform and shiny shoes, prepared for their first year at school. That initial school experience can be scary but also an exciting milestone. We are reminded to prepare for this change as parents, to create good bedtime routines, read to them, and equip them with the necessary skills to help with the transition. What they don't prepare you for, however, is that the start of the school term is also peak season for blood-sucking parasites, namely head lice!

Head lice are the unspoken misery of our schools, but it doesn't have to be that way. Across Europe, head lice are seen as a normal part of growing up, just as usual as catching a cold. In the UK head lice, infestations are stigmatised, but in reality, head lice don't discriminate.

Children are the main spreaders of head lice due to them spending lots of time in close contact with one another. Research by the Institute of mums revealed two-thirds of children can expect to catch head lice at least once during

childhood, with an average of 2.2 infestations per child. I can assure you as someone who is totally focused on eliminating these critters that they don't care about whether your hair is clean, dirty, curly or straight, or even sprayed with repellent.

A female louse is programmed to lean out of the host's hair with back claws clasping a hair follicle, and front claws stretched out to grab any passing new host's hair. When a new hair passes by, they cling on, and it's as simple as that.

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by Eileen Hutchinson
Owner of NitNOT Head lice clinic
and the developer of NitNOT head lice serum



How to prevent head lice is a question often asked, with regular mentions of tea tree oil, however, there is not enough evidence to prove its efficacy, and it's important to realise natural treatments can cause severe allergic reactions. I recommend that you stick to using a CE certified brand of head lice serum, meaning you can be sure it has been rigorously tested for safety and effectiveness. The following simple steps can help your family avoid an infestation:

1 Check for lice and nits before the start of the school term, conducting weekly head checks throughout the year. The best way to check is to use a nit comb on your child's wet hair, wiping on a tissue after each stroke to check for eggs, nits and lice.

2 Reduce risk by putting longer hair in braids, buns or ponytails. The

longer the hair, the higher the risk of contracting lice.

3 Use a separate brush for every member of the family. Head lice won't fall out onto hats, jackets, or furniture, but a louse that gets stuck in the bristles of your brush can stay alive for up to three days.

4 Make sure to do a thorough check before a trip to the hairdressers, if lice are found mid cut most hairdressers will stop. As you can imagine, this can lead to tears and trauma.

Lastly, it's crucial to think about how we come across to our children when discussing lice. Be conscious, remain calm, and treat others with kindness. I've had many discussions with distraught parents, and also teens who feel too embarrassed to tell anyone. Many subsequently seek to treat themselves without informing their parents. If we work to make this less of a taboo subject, we can work towards fostering honest and open relationships with others.

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