

Head lice

Head lice are tiny insects that live in hair and feed on blood. Young children are more likely to get head lice because they tend to have more head-to-head contact with other children, especially during playtime. They can cause itching of the scalp, but they do not cause disease. Lice can affect anyone, and are not a sign of dirty hair or poor hygiene.

Symptoms include itchiness on the scalp, seeing live lice or nits (lice eggs) in the hair, and sores or red bumps on the scalp or neck from scratching.

How it spreads

Head lice spread from one person to another by direct head-to-head contact, or by sharing a comb or hairbrush. Lice cannot jump or fly, and cannot live long away from the human head. They do not live or breed on animals, bedding, furniture, carpets, clothes or soft toys.

Exclusion period

Do not exclude as long as treatment begins before the next attendance at the service. The child does not need to be sent home immediately if head lice are found.

Actions for educators and other staff

Follow the exclusion period in the *Staying healthy* guidelines.

If one child in a class has head lice, it is likely that several others also have them. Do not isolate a child who has lice.

Reduce head-to-head contact between children if someone at your service has head lice. Avoid sharing of hats and other headwear.

Tell families if there is someone in your service with head lice. Support families by providing factual information, reducing parental anxiety and not singling out individual children with head lice.

Actions for parents and carers

If your child has head lice, keep them at home and treat them straight away. You may send your child back to the service as soon as your child has started treatment. Talk to your pharmacist about treatment options.

Check for head lice in other family members as well.

Check your child's head once a week for head lice. If you find any lice or eggs, begin treatment immediately. Check for lice every 2 days until no lice or eggs are found for 10 consecutive days.

More information about head lice

See healthdirect for more information on prevention, diagnosis and treatment of head lice (healthdirect.gov.au/head-lice).

To find out if a child needs medical help:

- use the online symptom checker (healthdirect.gov.au/symptom-checker)
- speak to a registered nurse by calling the 24-hour health advice hotline on 1800 022 222.