

Head Lice Information Sheet for HCWs

Patients can have an **infestation by *Pediculus humanus capitis* (head louse) on hair, beards, moustaches, eyebrows and eyelashes.**

They spread by having direct hair-to-hair contact with a person who has head lice. They can also spread from indirect contact with items such as hats, towels or combs. Head lice cannot jump or fly, and cannot be caught from animals.

The incubation period of eggs is 7-10 days and within 7 days of hatching, the nymph becomes a mature adult capable of reproducing. Adult lice can live up to 40 days on a head but do not live for more than 2 days if separated from the human body. Itching only occurring after 4-6 weeks as host develops sensitivity to louse saliva.

Head lice can be spread as long as viable eggs or live lice remain on the person affected or items such as hats, towels or combs.

In hospital, adult patients do not require isolation. Patients should avoid head to head contact with other persons and should not share hats, towels or combs until completion of treatment or until no live lice seen. Paediatric patients are isolated for practical reasons until after first application of treatment

Treatment is carried out by the application of solution provided by pharmacy which causes the live lice to suffocate. It is important to follow the product information leaflet exactly when applying the treatment and ensure that the correct number of treatments are carried out.

Contact the Pharmacist if live lice are present after completion of both applications of treatment, for further advice.

Advice should be given to carers and other household members to have their hair examined for signs of infestation.

Eyebrows / Eyelashes

Head lice found on eyebrows or eyelashes should be treated with a twice daily application of petroleum jelly to affected areas using a cotton bud or tissue which is disposed of as clinical waste after each application.

Disposable gloves and a disposable plastic apron should be worn when applying the petroleum jelly.

The treatment should be continued for ten days and the area examined regularly for live lice or eggs.

Fine tooth combs or nit combs should be single-patient use only and cleaned with detergent and hot water after each use. The comb should be discarded when treatment and subsequent combing has been completed. Personal hairbrushes and combs should be discarded prior to treatment. Hairbrushes and combs should not be shared during period of treatment.

In some circumstances the use of petroleum jelly may be used for patients with little hair e.g. patients receiving chemotherapy.

If for any reason a patient cannot use a prescribed treatment then an option is:

Wet combing.

To do this you need to have a fine toothed comb/nit comb

Wash hair with ordinary shampoo

Apply lots of conditioner

Comb whole of head from roots to the ends

Wet comb on days 1, 5, 9 and 13 to catch any newly hatched head lice. Check again on day 17 to see if hair free from head lice, if not repeat the process until it is.

The nit comb is single patient use and should be cleaned between uses.