

# Treating and controlling head lice

Dispelling the myths

## Head lice problems

- Head lice problems occur even though parents try to stop them
- Parents are given poor and conflicting advice and information
- These myths often come from trusted sources



Photo: Professor Rick Speare

## Myths about head lice

Kids with lice scratch or itch

50% don't

Head lice jump or fly from head to head

Head lice can't jump or fly

Lice live in carpets, beds and clothes

Lice live only on heads

## More myths

One treatment is enough

One treatment will not get rid of lice

Everyone in the family should be treated

Treat only family members with live lice

Some products prevent head lice

Tie long hair back and check for lice regularly

Head lice are selective about their home

Head lice like all hair – clean, dirty, long, short...

## Some facts

- Eggs are laid close to the scalp
- They hatch after 6 or 7 days
- There are 3 nymph (baby) stages before maturity (adult) which is 10 days after hatching
- Lice live for about 30 days spending their entire life on the human head
- Females lay 3 to 8 eggs per day

## More facts

- Head lice are easy to kill
- In two schools with at least 50 cases of head lice in each 1000 hats were checked and no lice were found on them
- In a primary school where 7000 lice were found on children's heads none were found on the carpet.

## The great escape

- Few lice ever fall off the head
- Those that do are probably about to die
- If healthy lice fall they generally die quickly, depending on how humid it is
  - eg 24 hours in Townsville in the wet season
  - 6 hours in Townsville in the dry season

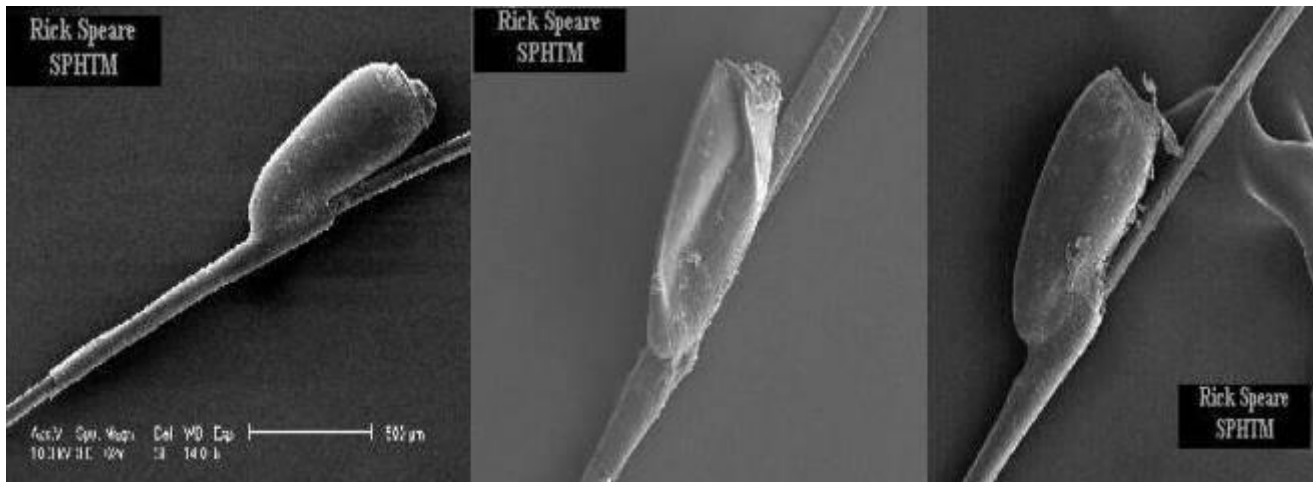


## Head lice eggs (nits)

- It is helpful to be able to identify the eggs
- Sunlight or strong light and magnification may help
- If a child has empty hatched eggs or dead eggs and no live lice or crawlers they do not have an active infection and **no treatment is needed.**



Lice eggs have curved walls and will pop when squeezed

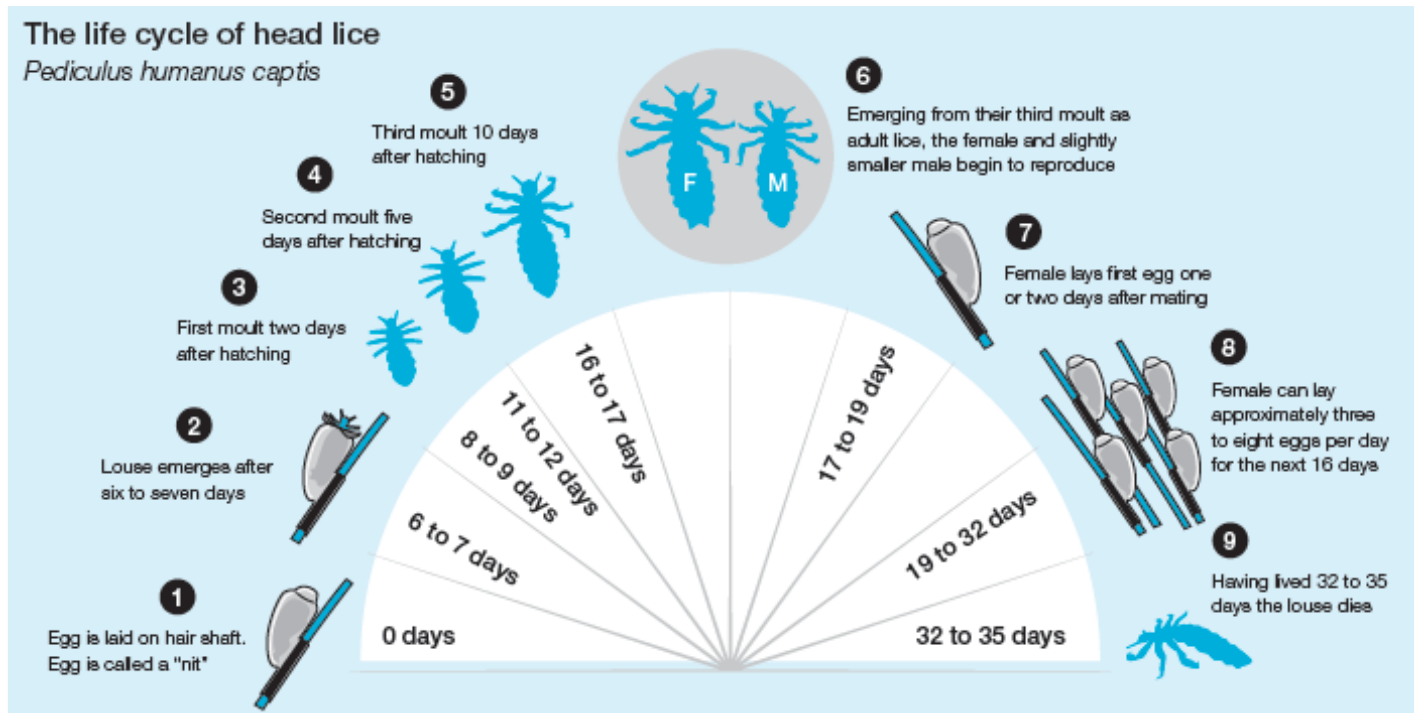


Lice eggs have curved walls and will pop when squeezed

Dead eggs have collapsed sides

Hatched eggs have a flat top in profile

# To get rid of lice you have to stop them breeding



Life cycle of a head louse

## Steps for treating head lice

### Step 1 Detection

Comb hair conditioner onto dry, brushed hair

Divide hair in small (3-4cm) sections

Comb sections 3 or 4 times

Wipe onto a paper towel

Look for lice and eggs

### Step 2 Treatment

Use a licensed or registered product

OR

Use the comb and conditioner method every 2 days until no lice are found for 10 days

### Step 3 Check for resistance

If an insecticide has worked  
the lice will be dead in  
20 minutes

After this time check  
Are the lice moving?

No → the product has  
worked

Yes → the product has not  
worked

### Step 4 Retreatment

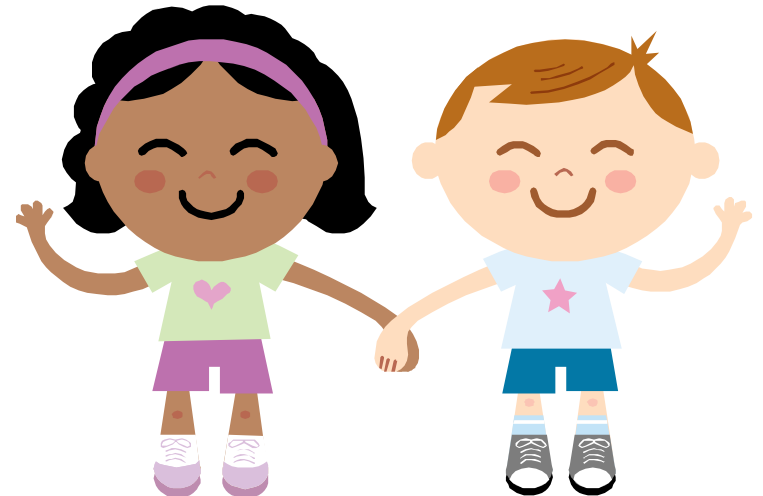
Reapply the product 7 days  
after the first treatment

For heavy infestations, retreat  
7 days after the second  
treatment

What if the lice aren't dead?

Lice resistance cannot be predicted

- retreat as soon as possible using a product with a different active chemical



Nothing works...

The four reasons for treatment failure are:

1. Inadequate application
2. Lice are resistant to the chemical
3. Failure to re treat
4. Reinfection

If you are having difficulties start at the top of the list and work down.

Remember these points:

- Always check for live lice before treating
- No treatment kills 100% of the eggs
- Re treat 7 days after the first application
- Test to make sure the treatment has worked and change products if necessary
- Head lice can be controlled but it takes a systematic approach.

Need more information?

[www.health.vic.gov.au/headlice](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/headlice)

[www.health.qld.gov.au/headlice](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/headlice)





Good luck and happy hunting!

