<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Headlouse facts</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Wet combing treatment</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Headlouse are a social pest and rarely pose a threat to health.</td>
<td>It is the responsibility of the parent/guardian to check their child’s hair for headlouse and to treat for headlouse if they are present. It is not the responsibility of school or child care centre staff to check or treat students for headlouse. Parents/guardians may be notified if a staff member believes a child has headlouse. The child and other household members should be checked, and if necessary, treatment should begin before the child returns to school. A school may request a note from the doctor stating that the child has been effectively treated before the child returns to school.</td>
<td>Wet combing can be used to both check for and treat headlouse. You will need hair conditioner (a cheap product is fine, and white conditioner makes headlouse easier to see), and a special headlouse comb from a chemist. Fine metal combs are recommended. Work under a bright light or sunlight.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Headlouse only live on human heads.</td>
<td>- Successful treatment does not protect the person from getting more headlouse later.</td>
<td>- Eight step technique:</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Headlouse can live in clean or dirty hair.</td>
<td>- Headlouse treatments often don’t kill 100% of the nits (eggs).</td>
<td>1. Generously apply conditioner to dry hair to completely cover the scalp and the full length of the hair.</td>
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<td>- Headlouse are transferred mainly by direct head-to-head contact; rarely by brushes, combs, ribbons, hats etc.</td>
<td>- Headlouse do not carry disease, but bacterial infections can occur from scratching the scalp.</td>
<td>2. Untangle the hair with a wide-toothed comb.</td>
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<td>- Headlouse do not carry disease, but bacterial infections can occur from scratching the scalp.</td>
<td>- Headlouse are small insects (2-4 mm long and about 1 mm wide) with a flat body and six clawed legs, and are pale to dark brown in colour</td>
<td>3. Put the headlouse comb flat against the scalp and draw the comb through each section of hair from the root of the hair to the ends.</td>
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<td>- Headlouse treatments often don’t kill 100% of the nits (eggs).</td>
<td>- Headlouse only live on human heads.</td>
<td>4. Wipe the comb after each stroke onto white tissue or kitchen paper, checking each time for headlouse and nits.</td>
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<td>- Successful treatment does not protect the person from getting more headlouse later.</td>
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<td>5. Repeat for every part of the head at least five times.</td>
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<td>Headlouse:</td>
<td>- Headlouse do not carry disease, but bacterial infections can occur from scratching the scalp.</td>
<td>6. Dispose of tissues in a bin.</td>
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<td>- are small insects (2-4 mm long and about 1 mm wide) with a flat body and six clawed legs, and are pale to dark brown in colour</td>
<td>- Symptoms may include excessive itching of the scalp especially at the front, nape of the neck, behind the ears, under the fringe, and at the base of plaits and ponytails. Note: Not all people with headlouse will itch.</td>
<td>7. Wash the hair with warm water and shampoo; rinse thoroughly.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- feed on blood, piercing the scalp several times a day</td>
<td>- Treatment</td>
<td>8. Scrub the comb with an old toothbrush in hot soapy water.</td>
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<td>- crawl and do not fly, jump or hop</td>
<td>- The two most common headlouse treatment methods are ‘wet combing’ and ‘chemical’ treatment:</td>
<td>If you find live headlouse, repeat steps 1-8, two to three times a week for three weeks. When no more headlouse or nits can be found, follow steps 1-8 once a week to keep everyone headlouse-free.</td>
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<td>- nymphs (babies/young headlouse) take about a week to reach maturity, and live for another 2-3 weeks – each mature female can lay up to eight eggs a day (that’s over 150 eggs each!).</td>
<td>- ‘wet combing’ involves wetting hair and scalp liberally with hair conditioner to stun the headlouse, then combing the headlouse and nits out</td>
<td>Chemical treatment</td>
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<td>Nits (eggs):</td>
<td>- ‘chemical’ treatment uses ‘pediculicides’ which kill the headlouse. Other treatments such as electric combs, herbal/essential oils and enzyme treatments may also remove headlouse, but follow the manufacturer’s instructions for best results. People who suffer from epilepsy, heart disease or have heart pacemakers or other neurostimulator devices should avoid using or handling electric combs. If there is any adverse reaction to a treatment, seek medical advice.</td>
<td>- Treatment preparations contain chemicals which can kill headlouse and nits (eggs), although not all are effective against nits.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- are tiny, hard, yellow to white in colour and are attached firmly to the hair shaft close to the scalp</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Always follow the manufacturer’s instructions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- hatch as nymphs after 7-10 days</td>
<td></td>
<td>- It is possible to catch headlouse very soon after treatment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- if more than 1-2 cm from the scalp are probably hatched or dead</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Only treat those people who have active headlouse but continue to check everyone each day for 7-10 days.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- may have a ‘sandy’ or ‘gritty’ feel when running fingers through the hair and are easier to see than headlouse</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Headlouse treatment preparations are available from pharmacies without a prescription - they may also be available through schools.</td>
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<td>- can be confused with dandruff which is flaky and easy to remove.</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Always re-treat 7-10 days after the first treatment to kill any headlouse that may have hatched from nits that survived the first treatment.</td>
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</table>
Headlice
PREVENTION & TREATMENT

Chemical treatment precautions
Keep treatment preparations away from eyes, nose and mouth. Seek medical advice before use on pregnant or breast-feeding women, infants under two years old or people with sensitive skin.
The wet combing technique can be used as an alternative treatment.

Chemical treatment hints
Do not use hair dryers after applying a treatment preparation. The heat can destroy the active ingredient.
Avoid using hair conditioners (including 2-in-1 shampoo/conditioners, and the wet combing technique) for a day before and after applying chemical treatment preparations. Conditioner can reduce the effectiveness of the treatment.

Removing nits
It is not necessary to remove all nits if they are dead (more than 1-2 cm from the scalp). However, a school community may prefer that nits are removed.
Nits stick very firmly to the hair and can be difficult to remove. Wetting hair with vinegar may help to loosen the nits, which can then be combed out with a headlice comb or picked out by hand.

Treatment failure
The most common reasons for treatment failure are:
• not following the manufacturer’s instructions
• the resistance of headlice to the chemical used
• not repeating the treatment in 7-10 days (to kill headlice that have hatched from eggs that weren’t killed in the first treatment)
• getting headlice from an untreated person.
If the treatment has not got rid of the headlice:
• If chemical treatment was used, check the instructions and repeat the treatment if they have not been correctly followed (especially the need to repeat in 7-10 days).
• Check the heads of all household members using the ‘wet combing’ technique (overleaf) and treat all who have headlice (even if they don’t feel itchy).
• Try an alternative treatment (check with your chemist to make sure you are choosing a treatment preparation with a different active chemical, as different brands may contain the same chemicals).
• Try the wet combing treatment method (overleaf).

Preventing the spread
• Avoid direct head-to-head contact.
• Avoid sharing brushes, combs, ribbons, hats, helmets.
• Consider cleaning brushes, combs, towels, pillow cases with hot water and detergent (60°C for 30 seconds).
• Discourage children from playing with each others’ hair.
• Keep long hair firmly plaited, or at least tied back - slick down stray hairs with hairspray or gel.
• Brush hair and check for headlice regularly.
• Shaving the head is not necessary.

For more information
Contact:
• your local council Environmental Health Officer
• your community health centre
• chemists and GPs
• the Child and Youth Health Parent Helpline: 1300 364 100 or online at www.cyh.com
• the Department of Health on 8226-7100 or online at www.health.sa.gov.au/pehs/environ-health-index.htm.

On the web
• James Cook University, North Queensland
  www.jcu.edu.au/school/phtm/PHTM/hlice/hlinfo1.htm
• Department of Health, Victoria

This fact sheet has been produced by the Environmental Health Service of the South Australian Department of Health.
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October 2005