

# The Children's Doctor



**My daughter has had head lice 3 times in the last 3 months. What is the best way to treat head lice and can I prevent them from coming back?**

Head lice are an extremely common problem in preschools and schools. Children get head lice because lice need to attach to hair and suck blood from the scalp to survive. It has nothing to do with hygiene! You can tell your child has head lice by examining the hair shafts for nits (eggs). Nits are attached to the shaft of the hair and do not come off easily when you scrape your finger up the shaft of the hair. Alternatively, you can try to find live lice. This can be quite difficult as the lice move very quickly. One trick is to smother the dry hair with white conditioner and comb through the hair with a fine tooth comb. The conditioner will stun the lice, preventing them from running through the hair. If you wipe the comb on a tissue, you will be able to see any lice or eggs that have come off the hair shaft.

Many treatments are available over the counter at your pharmacy to treat head lice. There are four different categories of treatments

- 1) pyrethrins
- 2) synthetic pyrethroids
- 3) organophosphates
- 4) herbal products

Some head lice are resistant to one or more of these treatments. You will know if the treatment is successful by combing through the hair with conditioner after the treatment. Look at any lice that come off the hair. If no lice are moving at all, the treatment has been successful. If the lice are still wriggling around on the tissue, then you may need to try a new treatment from an alternative group. All treatments should be repeated a week later to ensure that any lice that have hatched since the initial treatment are killed.

To prevent head lice infestation, I would suggest that your daughter wear her hair tied back firmly (preferably in plaits) whenever at school. You may want to cover her hair in hair spray to try to prevent lice from attaching to her hair. Her hair should be checked weekly with the conditioner and comb to see if the lice have returned!