

## Head Lice (Pediculosis) (Treatment)

See Infection Control Manual, Ectoparasites section for practical details.

### **HEADLICE:** *Pediculus capitis*

Head lice infestation may present as an intense scalp irritation, although chronic carriers may be desensitised. The louse is 3 to 4 mm long, but the empty eggshells (nits) glued to the hairs, or black powder on pillows or collars (the faeces of the louse) are easier to see. Transfer is by direct head to head contact for at least one minute. On detection, the infestation has usually been present for at least four weeks.

### **TREATMENT OF HEADLICE**

There are two choices for treatment:

1. 'Wet Combing'

See Camden and Islington's Community Trust's Formulary. Further information is also available from Medicines Information Department (ext 73523).

2. Lotions

- Treatment should only be given in confirmed cases, i.e. where a living, moving louse is seen.
- Treatment course consists of *two* applications of insecticide (see below for choices), used *one week* apart.
- Treat all contacts that have live lice, ideally at the same time, to prevent re-infestation.
- Two to three days after final application, check hair thoroughly with a detector comb. Carefully comb sections of wet hair over white paper or a towel, on all family and close contacts.
- If, after treatment, adult lice are still present, select next choice of treatment.
- As some eggs may hatch after use of an insecticide, the presence of young lice only does not indicate resistance.
- Always thoroughly investigate the reason for treatment failure, e.g. initial misdiagnosis, inadequate or incorrect application of treatment, or reinfection.
- Children younger than six months should only be treated under medical supervision. Caution in pregnancy and lactation.
- Treatment may affect permed, coloured or bleached hair.

**1<sup>st</sup> choice**

Malathion 0.5% aqueous solution (Derbac-M<sup>®</sup> liquid)

**Directions for malathion**

- See full manufacturer's directions – approximately 50 ml per head is required.
- With head upright, rub well into roots of dry hair and scalp.
- Leave for 12 hours or overnight, letting hair dry naturally.
- Shampoo hair with ordinary shampoo.
- Continue regular (weekly) detection combing, and regular grooming of hair (twice daily).
- Malathion has no residual action; contact tracing is vital to achieve successful eradication of infestation in the community.
- This treatment is suitable for asthmatics.

**TREATMENT OF HEADLICE (contd.)**

**2<sup>nd</sup> choice**

Phenothrin 0.2% alcoholic lotion (Full Marks<sup>®</sup>)

**Directions for phenothrin**

- As for malathion (above), except leave in for two hours only.
- The lotion is in an alcohol base which may cause itching and is not suitable for those with asthma, eczema or for children under 1 year of age.
- The liquid preparation is available which is an aqueous base but this is not as effective. Contact Medicines Information (ext 73523) for further advice if required.