

# Head lice & threadworms

## A common problem

Head lice are tiny wingless insects that are grey-brown in colour. They are the size of a pinhead when they hatch and 3mm long (the size of a sesame seed) when fully grown. Head lice cannot fly, jump or swim. They are spread by head-to-head contact and climb from the hair of an infected person to the hair of someone else. Head lice are **not** the result of dirty hair or poor hygiene. Children are often affected by head lice because they tend to have more head-to-head contact while at school or during play. Head lice are most common in children between 4 to 11 years old.

### Getting rid of head lice:

Head lice can be effectively treated using medicated lotions or by wet-combing, using a specially designed head lice comb. Neither treatment method will protect against re-infestation if head-to-head contact is made with someone with head lice during the treatment period.

The wet-combing method involves removing the head lice by systematically combing the hair, from the scalp towards the ends, using a special fine-toothed comb with a spacing of less than 0.3mm. Your pharmacist can advise you on which combs are suitable. No medicated products are necessary for wet-combing.

Medicated lotion or spray is an alternative method for treating head lice. However, no medicated treatment is 100% effective.

You can also ask your school nurse, health visitor or pharmacist.

### Pharmacist's tips

Your Pharmacist can recommend an over-the-counter lotion or spray. Medicated treatments should only be used if a living (moving) head louse is found. Conditioners and shampoos are not thought to be effective and are therefore not recommended. Make sure that you have enough lotion to treat everyone in your family who is actually affected by head lice.

### Threadworms

Threadworms are tiny parasitic worms that hatch eggs in and infect the large intestine of humans. They are the most common type of worm infection in the UK and are particularly common in young children under the age of 10.

Threadworms are white and look like small pieces of thread. You may notice them around your child's bottom or in your child's faeces (poo). They don't always cause symptoms, but may cause itchiness or signs of scratching around their bottom. This can be worse at night and can sometimes disturb sleep.

### When to see your GP

If you think you or your child may have threadworms, you can usually treat the infection yourself with medication available at pharmacies without prescription.

You only need to speak to your GP if you are pregnant or your child is under two years old, as the usual medication is not suitable.

