What are head lice?

Head lice are small, whitish-brown or reddish-brown insects that live on human hair. They feed on blood from the scalp several times a day.

Head lice produce eggs (also known as nits) near the root of the hair. Head lice cannot fly or jump, but can crawl from one head to another.

Head lice do not carry or spread disease.

What are the signs and symptoms?

Symptoms of head lice may include:
- itching and scratching (not always present)
- small red bumps or scabs that occur from scratching
- sometimes, small white eggs may be seen near the scalp. These resemble dandruff which does not easily come off when the hair is rubbed.

How are head lice spread?

Head lice are highly contagious.

They are spread between people by direct hair to hair contact only.

Head lice cannot spread from shared clothing or bed linen. This is because head lice cannot survive for very long once they are away from the scalp.

Who is at risk of getting head lice?

Anyone can get head lice.

Head lice are most commonly found in children. Often, an entire family or household will get head lice because of close living conditions.

How are head lice treated?

Hair conditioner or medicated hair treatments may be used in combination with carefully fine-tooth combing sections of hair to remove the head lice. Your nurse can assist you with this.

Your doctor will prescribe and explain the treatment option that best suits you.
Head lice
Infection Prevention

Contact information
Ph: 03 9076 3139

Infection Prevention – The Alfred
55 Commercial Road,
Melbourne VIC 3004
Tel: (03) 9076 2000
alfredhealth.org.au

Isolation: You will be cared for in a single room. Staff will wear gowns and gloves when caring for you. These precautions will remain in place until 24 hours after you have been treated for head lice.

Hand hygiene: It is important that staff, patients and visitors clean their hands every time they enter or leave your room. They can use alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water.

It's OK to ask: Please feel free to remind your health care worker to clean their hands.

Cleaning: Your room will be regularly cleaned with a focus on frequently touched surfaces.

As a patient, what should I do?

- notify your nurse or doctor if you think you or somebody you live with has head lice.
- try to avoid scratching your head (to protect your skin).

What do my visitors need to do?

Your visitors should always clean their hands on entering and leaving your room by using the provided alcohol-based hand rub, or soap and water.

Family members or other household contacts should check themselves for head lice.

Your visitors should avoid coming to the hospital if they have head lice.

Your clothing should be bagged and sent home to be washed in hot water and dried in a dryer.

Any questions?
If you would like further information about Head Lice, please contact Alfred Health Infection Prevention on (03) 9076 3139.

Further information:
Better Health Channel
www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

National Safety & Quality
www.safetyandquality.gov.au/

Department of Health, Victoria

If you would like to provide feedback or request a copy in a different format, contact us at patient.info@alfred.org.au