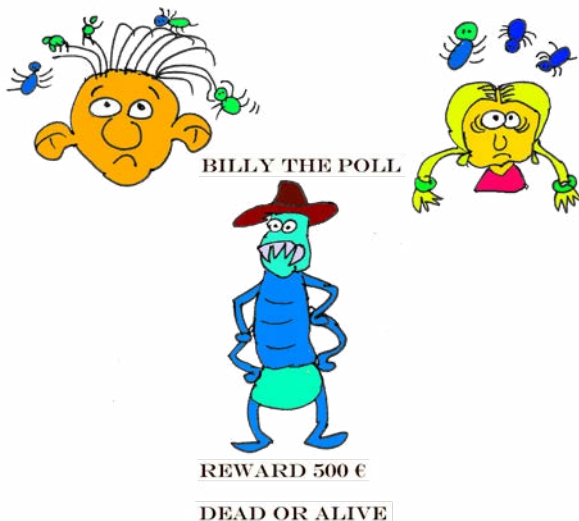


Head lice *Pediculosis capitis*

What is pediculosis?

It is a scalp infection caused by a parasite called *Pediculus humanus capitis* or head louse.



What are nits?

They are the eggs laid by lice. They stick to hair shafts and are a grey-brown colour. The viable nits are the ones that are very close to the scalp.

How do they spread?

They are spread by direct contact with other people and their belongings. Lice do not jump or fly, but they move through the hair fast.

How are they diagnosed?

Diagnosis is clinical and live lice or nits have to be spotted close to the scalp. Pediculosis causes a lot of itching and this can cause sores on the skin.

You should check the head thoroughly, especially behind the ears and on the back of the neck.

How are they treated?

You should apply a specific lotion or cream (never shampoo) to dry hair and rub it all over

the scalp, particularly the back of the neck and behind the ears:

Pediculicides (products containing insecticides that kill lice and nits): Most of these products recommend applying for 20 – 30 minutes, but to ensure that no lice or nits survive it is a good idea to apply permethrin for 4 – 8 hours and malathion for 8 – 12 hours.

Then wash the hair with normal shampoo and let it dry without using a hairdryer; the heat would counteract the lotion's effect.

These products are not suitable for infants under 6 months old. Malathion is not suitable for children under the age of six.

Products that work by drowning the lice, like dimethicone: leave on all night. They are suitable for young children.

- Natural oils have not been properly studied and can cause hypersensitivity.
- Hair conditioner is not a substitute for specific lice treatment, but it eliminates static electricity and this prevents the lice from crawling through the hair fast when it is combed when dry and also makes it easier to remove the nits. There is no proof that it should be done on different days from the specific treatment.

No treatment eliminates all the nits: the treatment should be repeated after 7 or 8 days.

Infested clothes should be washed at 60 °C.

Should all children be treated when there is an outbreak at school?

They should all be checked for lice, but only those that are infected should be treated.

Preventive treatments and repellents are not effective and should not be used.

There are precautions that you can take, like tying hair back, or avoiding heads coming into contact.

Once the treatment is completed the child can go back to school.