

For parents and whānau

Practical information about education for parents and carers

Head lice

Head lice, nits, or kutis, are very common in kids and easily spread around school. They can be annoying but are treatable. They shouldn't affect your child's education.

How can I tell if my child has head lice?

Your child may have an itchy scalp, especially around the nape of the neck, crown and ears. You may see live lice on the scalp, or hard, pale grey or yellow-white eggs (nits) like grains of salt attached to the hair, close to the scalp. Or the first indication you may have is when the school tells you there's an outbreak.

How do I treat them?

The key to dealing with lice is to check, treat and inform.

- 1. Check:** Check your child's hair regularly - once a week is a good guide. In the past, teachers and public health nurses lined kids up for public and humiliating checks at school. These days schools don't do checks so it's up to you to check at home.
- 2. Treat:** If you find live lice or unhatched eggs, treat your child as soon as you can. Your chemist can advise you on the best way to deal with the problem. Schools also give good advice and can refer you for more advice and treatment. Treatments don't need to be expensive, although they can be time-consuming, for example using a fine-toothed comb every day.
- 3. Inform:** Let the school know when your child has lice or nits. They can then tell other parents that there is an outbreak, so everyone can check and treat their own children. Teachers can make adjustments in the classroom – such as removing the 'dress-up' box until the infestation is over, or reducing close group work where

students' heads are touching. Many schools work with the public health nurse when there is a school-wide infestation.

Will my child have to stay away from school?

The Ministry of Health advise that a child with live lice should stay away from kura or school until treatment has started. Once the treatment has started, the school shouldn't exclude your child or ask you to keep them at home.

[Head lice - Ministry of Health \[https://www.health.govt.nz/your-health/conditions-and-treatments/diseases-and-illnesses/head-lice\]](https://www.health.govt.nz/your-health/conditions-and-treatments/diseases-and-illnesses/head-lice)

How can I stop my child getting head lice?

Head lice is really common in children. There are some things you can do to help prevent them:

- brush your child's hair every day (or remind them to do this)
- don't share brushes, combs, towels or hats
- check that the school doesn't store children's hats all together
- check your child's hair for lice regularly, and act straight away if you find any
- you don't need to shave your child's hair, but it can help to keep it short or tied up when at school.

What can I do if my child keeps getting re-infested?

It is very frustrating when you have treated your child and find they keep getting re-infested.

Tell the school every time your child comes home with a fresh batch of lice – so that the whole school community can take responsibility for the problem. If head lice are an ongoing problem the public health nurse may assist the school to provide information and advice to parents.

It's also common for children to re-infest themselves - it only takes a stray nit or lice to start the cycle again. Make sure you complete any treatment, keep checking, and follow the prevention tips.



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