



# THE NORTHERN TERRITORY HEAD LICE ACTION PACK !

4<sup>th</sup> EDITION

Information for NT parents, schools and  
child care centres

2005



### ***About the NT Head Lice Action Pack***

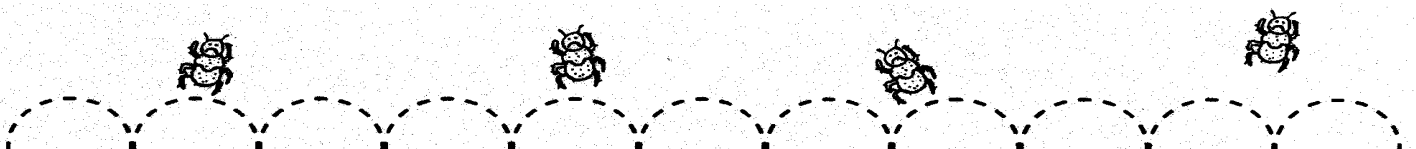
*Head lice guidelines were revised by the Centre for Disease Control, Darwin, in April 2002. This document is consistent with other Australian state and Territory authorities. Acknowledgment is given to Phillip Weinstein from Communicable Disease Control Unit of the South Australian Health Commission and the document "Head lice".*

*This is the third edition of the **Head Lice Action Pack**. It has been revised to provide parents, schools, day care centres and community health centres with the latest information about head lice and the available treatment options. Further revisions will be performed if necessary. Please continue to use this edition until informed otherwise.*

*The **Head Lice Action Pack** has been provided to NT schools, day care centres and community health centres, free of charge, as a set of individual fact sheets that can be photocopied and distributed to parents. The guidelines can be distributed: when families ask for head lice information, at school or child care enrolment, or when head lice are discovered at the school, day care centre, or community health centre. We also encourage this information to be circulated amongst school, day care centre and community health centre staff.*

*The Department of Health and Community Services (DHCS) is available to provide education, support and training about head lice and nits. As always, we consider that there is a shared responsibility for management of head lice, distributed amongst parents, schools and the DHCS.*

*Disclaimer: Use of trade names in this document is for identification purposes only and does not constitute endorsement*



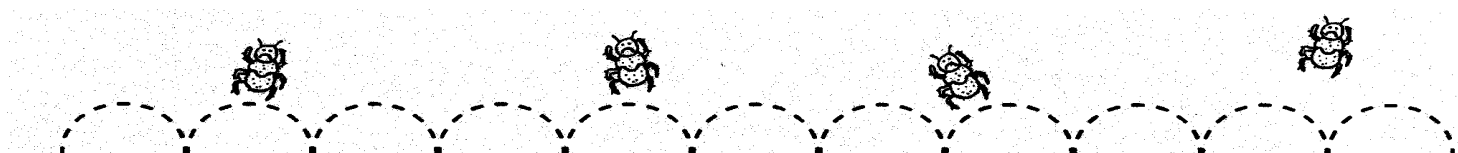


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## 1. NT HEAD LICE ACTION PACK! - FACTS ABOUT HEAD LICE AND NITS

### Head lice

Head lice are tiny wingless insects (2-3mm) that vary in colour from cream to brown. They are found attached to the hair near the scalp and are harder to see than nits.

### Nits

'Nits' is another name for the small eggs that are laid by head lice. They are the size of a grain of salt, yellow-white in colour and are hard and gritty in texture. They are found glued to the hair near the scalp. Common places are behind the ears, the back of neck and the fringe. Dead nits are often black in colour and are found well away from the scalp.

### Life cycle of head lice

Nits take about 7-10 days to hatch into head lice. They will only hatch if kept at a high temperature in a moist environment such as the scalp. They die very quickly on furniture, clothes, hairbrushes etc.

### Transmission

Lice are contagious. The usual way you catch head lice is from direct hair to hair contact with an infected person (eg. children playing or children or adults hugging). Head lice do not jump but they do walk and can fall from one head to another. Very occasionally, they can be passed on by sharing hats and brushes, but not through furniture or carpets.

### Problems

Common symptoms are itch and irritation causing sleep disturbance and behavioural problems. Head lice do not transmit AIDS or Hepatitis B. Very rare diseases such as typhus, trench and relapsing fever can be transmitted by head lice. More common complications are skin and lymph gland infections, as scratching breaks the skin.

### Who is likely to be affected, when and where?

Head lice are most often found in primary school children. This is because these children are the most likely to have prolonged close personal contact. Homes, playgrounds, kindergartens and childcare centres are places where close contact takes place. Adults may have head lice without being aware of it. *Cleanliness does not prevent head lice*, anyone can catch them.

Head lice infections do occur in cycles. In the Top End of the Northern Territory, the last big outbreak was in 1994-1995. At that time 50% of the Top End primary school children had head lice. There are probably more head lice in the Northern Territory than the southern states because warm humid environments favour hatching and survival of head lice. Head lice are more common in the wet season and "build up".



## 2. NT HEAD LICE ACTION PACK!-FACTS ABOUT HEAD LICE TREATMENT

### Treatment types

There are four main types: They are available as shampoos or alcohol based lotions.

PERMETHRIN (EG PYRIFOAM, QUELLADA, LYCLEAR),

PYRETHRINS (EG LYBAN, BANLICE, PARALICE),

MALATHION (EG KP24, LICE RID, HLT),

'NATURAL' PRODUCTS (EG TI-TREE OIL, KEROSENE, EUCALYPTUS OIL).

### Natural products (eg. Ti-tree oil, eucalyptus oil, kerosene)

These products are not natural at all. They are more poisonous than standard head lice treatments. They are more likely to burn skin and cause death if swallowed. We do not recommend the use of 'natural' products as they are not known to be safe or effective.

### Side effects

- Mild irritation of the eyes, nose and throat can occur with all head lice treatment. Care is needed with sensitive skin (these people should seek medical advice before treatment).
- All our recommended treatments have been proven to be safe if used correctly
- The risk of toxic effects increases for all head lice treatments if they are given more than three weeks in a row or after a break of less than 7 days.
- Alcohol based products can cause pain or irritation if there are open sores and cuts.

### Head lice treatments that don't work (resistance)

This worldwide problem is increasing. It is due to the head lice and nits becoming stronger and developing new enzymes and barriers to the head lice treatments. The recommended NT head lice treatments still work in most cases provided instructions are followed carefully.

### Manual removal of head lice

Hair should be combed at least once per week with a fine tooth metal nit comb (teeth 0.25mm apart, available from chemists). Combing is important as it helps identify live lice, and aids the removal of resistant lice. Hair conditioner helps with the combing by immobilising the lice present. Weekly combing plus head lice treatment is the best way of curing head lice.

### Prevention of head lice

Head lice treatments **do not** prevent head lice. Some measures that do work are:

- Weekly hair and scalp checks for all family members.
- Brush and comb hair frequently with nit combs
- Do not share brushes, combs, hats or pillows
- Wash hair brushes and combs at least once a week in hot soapy water
- Keep long hair tied back at school, consider keeping hair short
- All family members with live head lice or nits should be treated at the same time



### 3. NT HEAD LICE ACTION PACK! -HOW TO USE HEAD LICE TREATMENT

1. 1% permethrin is the recommended NT head lice treatment from 2002, based on toxicity profiles and product safety. The regime of annual rotation of head lice treatments to avoid resistance is no longer recommended, as products are available over the counter and rotation is difficult to enforce. 0.5% malathion in an alcohol base can be used for heavy infections. If other standard, licensed, lice treatments are found to be effective they can be used.
2. Check and treat all family members with live head lice at the same time. Often a person's scalp can become itchy from the chemicals used to treat lice so it is important to treat only those people who have **live** head lice.
3. Do not over treat. Use treatments **STRICTLY IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE DIRECTIONS ON THE PACKAGE**. Do not use more than once per week.
4. A head lice *shampoo* should be combed through the hair with a fine tooth metal comb (teeth 0.25mm apart) and rinsed out after 10 minutes.
5. A head lice *lotion* should be rubbed in and washed out 12 hours later with a regular shampoo.
6. Hair should be combed at least once per week with a fine tooth metal comb (teeth 0.25mm apart), one section at a time, with the head down over spread paper. This is more effective if hair conditioner is applied before combing. Hair conditioner should not be used at the same time as the head lice treatment.
7. Check hair and scalp in 7 days and repeat the treatment, after checking instructions on the packet.
8. Let the school know your child has been treated for head lice. This way other children can be checked and treated.

#### IMPORTANT NOTES

- Pregnant or breastfeeding women, people with sensitive skin, and parents of babies less than 12 months of age should consult a doctor before applying head lice treatments
- Avoid contact of the shampoo or lotion with eyes, nose or throat
- The person applying the treatment should wear protective gloves (to avoid unnecessary repeated skin exposure to the head lice treatment)



## 4. NT HEAD LICE ACTION PACK! - ANSWERS TO TREATMENT PROBLEMS

### 1. *The treatment doesn't work*

Suggested management:

- Check that you are performing the treatment correctly, according to the packet instructions
- Examine the scalp and hair carefully. Dead nits (that don't need treatment) are attached to the hair well away from the scalp and are dark in colour. Check with your Community Care Centre, Department of Health and Community Services, or the school nursing service if you are unsure
- Increase fine combing of hair (eg. daily) (See \*3. NT HEAD LICE ACTION PACK .How to use head lice treatment')
- If, after all of the above, head lice are still felt to be resistant, then change to a different type of head lice treatment. **If previously using 1% permethrin change to 1% malathion. If previously using 1% malathion change to 0.5% malathion in an alcohol base.** Consult Department of Health and Community Services, your pharmacist, or your local doctor if unsure.

### 2. *The lice do get killed and go away, but they come back very quickly.*

Your child may be getting reinfected by another family member or another child at school.

Suggested management:

- Check and treat all family members
- Treat all family members who have live head lice at the same time
- Increase fine combing of hair (eg. to daily) (\*3. NT HEAD LICE ACTION PACK .How to use head lice treatment')
- Consider cutting the hair short or tying it back at school
- Let the school know that your child has had head lice so they can let other parents know to check and treat their children
- If head lice is a big problem at your school consider organising a campaign to check and treat everyone on the same day (See '6. NT HEAD LICE ACTION PACK .- Appendix- Head lice programs')

### 3. *We are using a lot of head lice treatments that are expensive.*

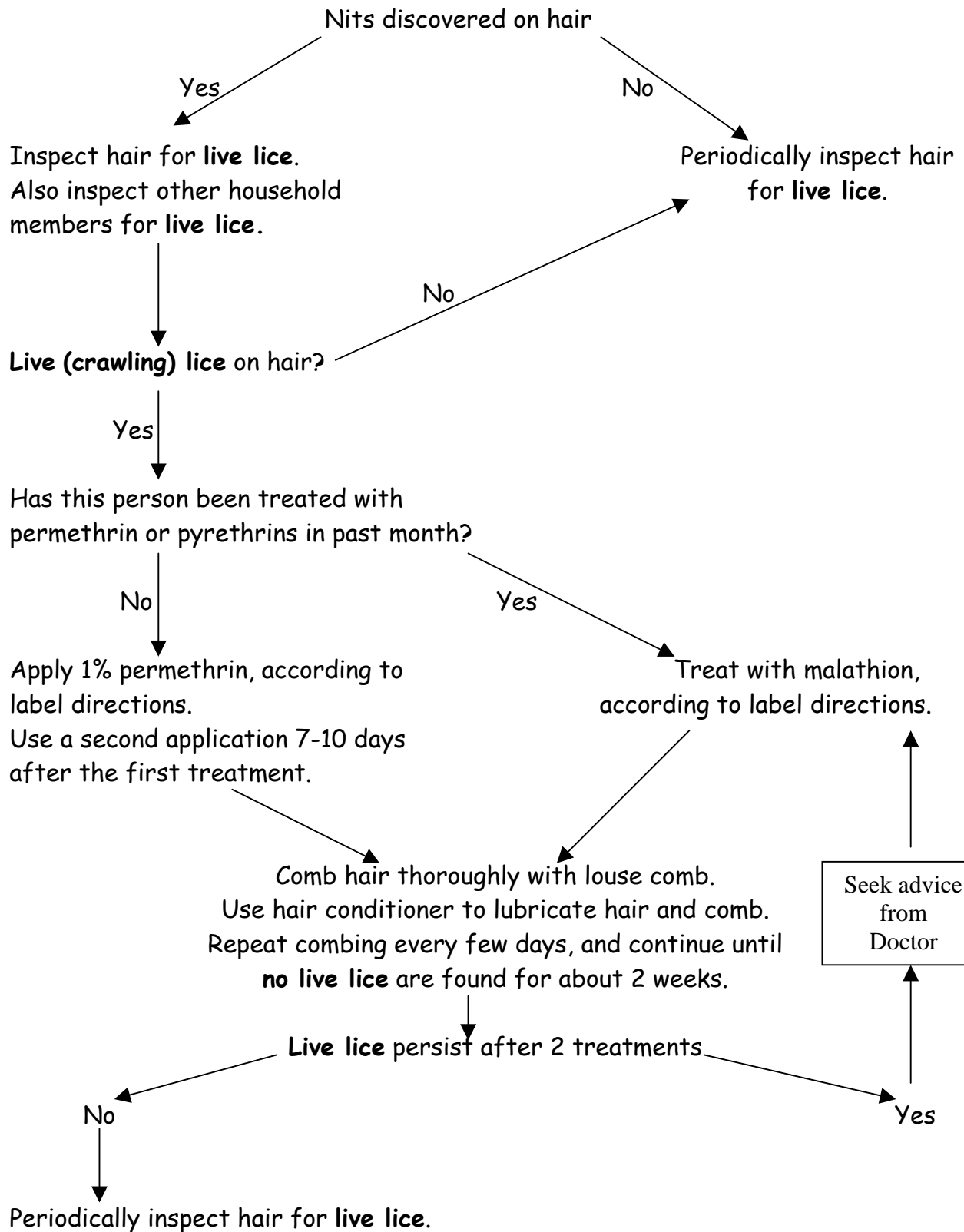
If you repeat the head lice treatment after a break of less than 7 days or if you give it for more than three weeks in a row, you do not make any difference to the head lice and instead you increase the risk of toxic effects.

Suggested management:

- Comb hair as often as possible (eg daily) (See \*3. NT HEAD LICE ACTION PACK .How to use head lice treatment')
- Check that the nits that are left are not just dead ones (dead nits are attached to the hair well away from the scalp and are dark in colour)
- Follow the instructions on the head lice packages. Do not use the treatments after a break of less than 7 days or for more than three weeks in a row
- If your child still has **live head lice** after three weeks of treatment you should change to a different head lice treatment. **If previously using 1% permethrin change to 1% malathion. If previously using 1% malathion change to 0.5% malathion in an alcohol base.** Consult Department of Health and Community Services, your pharmacist, or your local doctor if unsure.



# 5. NT HEAD LICE ACTION PACK! - HEAD LICE TREATMENT PROTOCOL





## 6. NT HEAD LICE ACTION PACK! -RESPONSIBILITIES AND RESOURCES

### Responsibilities

Head lice management is considered to be a joint responsibility between the Department of Health and Community Services, the Education Department and parents

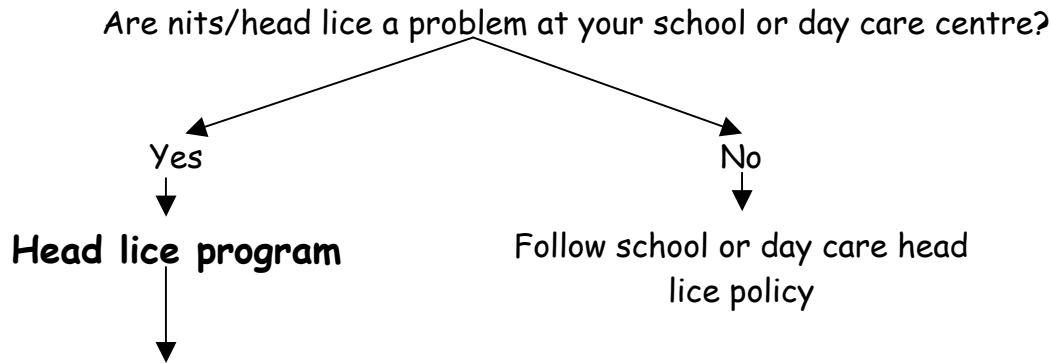
- **Parents' responsibilities** - to check and treat their children for head lice
- **Schools' responsibilities** - to inform parents when an outbreak occurs and to notify a parent/guardian at the end of the day if head lice are suspected or noticed. Schools can also be the site for a parent run head lice program
- **Department of Health and Community Services' responsibilities** - to provide up to date medical information, printed resources and on site education at community health centres; to provide education and support to schools, daycare centres and/or community groups if requested. Head lice treatment is provided free of charge for all persons with a health care card at community care centres

### Resources / Who can help

	Contact telephone number
Department of Health and Community Services:	
Centre for Disease Control	89228044
Community Paediatrician	89228444
School nursing service	89298776
Community health centre staff	
Casuarina	89227301
Palmerston	89993344
Nightcliff	89484900
Katherine	89738570
Nhulunbuy	89870435
Batchelor	89760011
Adelaide River	89767027
Pine Creek	89761268
Jabiru	89792018
Tennant Creek	89624218
Alice Springs	89516711
Other health centres	
Other	
Website: <a href="http://www.nitwits.com.au">www.nitwits.com.au</a>	
Your school council	
Local pharmacy	
Your Doctor	



## 7. NT HEAD LICE ACTION PACK! - HEAD LICE PROGRAMS



### Head lice programs

Inspect hair for live lice. Treat everyone with live head lice on the same day, week or weekend. Free treatment is available from community health centres for health care cardholders.

#### At home

Ask parents to check the family's hair for live lice. Treat family members with live lice, at home on the same day, week or weekend

#### At school

Notify parent/guardian at end of day of suspected infestation. Provide information on the biology of head lice and methods of treatment. DO NOT exclude child from school. If many children are affected, organise a campaign where children are all checked, and those with live lice treated and reviewed at school

Head lice programs cannot be successful unless 'owned' and run by parents from the school.

Help from the Department of Health and Community Services is available at any stage in the process including: introductory education sessions, program planning, and feedback to parents. Please contact the Community Paediatrician at Centre for Disease Control, Darwin on 89228044 if you would like some help in running a head lice campaign at your school or day care centre.

