

## What about using lotions?

Lotions have been used for many years, but people should be aware of what they are. The lotions available are not without problems. They can cause allergies, skin irritation and many other side effects. In recent years more controls have been introduced on lotions as more of their side effects are becoming known.

There are also other disadvantages. Lotions rarely work first time and repeats may be necessary increasing the risk of side effects. Many lice have developed resistance to lotions. They are also not suitable for babies.

In contrast, wet combing is totally safe, can be done any time and as often as required.

## Any other precautions?

There is no way to prevent headlice. It is advisable for children with long hair to tie it back to reduce the risk of contraction. Furthermore, if headlice are found in your home treat everyone's hair on the same day to avoid re-infestation. There is no need to wash laundry on a hot wash or keep children off school.

## Can lice come back?

Most parents will be very familiar with this problem. Sometimes lice are found after cleaning the hair because all the lice were not properly cleared. However, even after they have been cleared, children can catch lice again from their friends. The only way to reduce this problem is if the entire population were to clear the lice at the same time – Community Bug Busting.

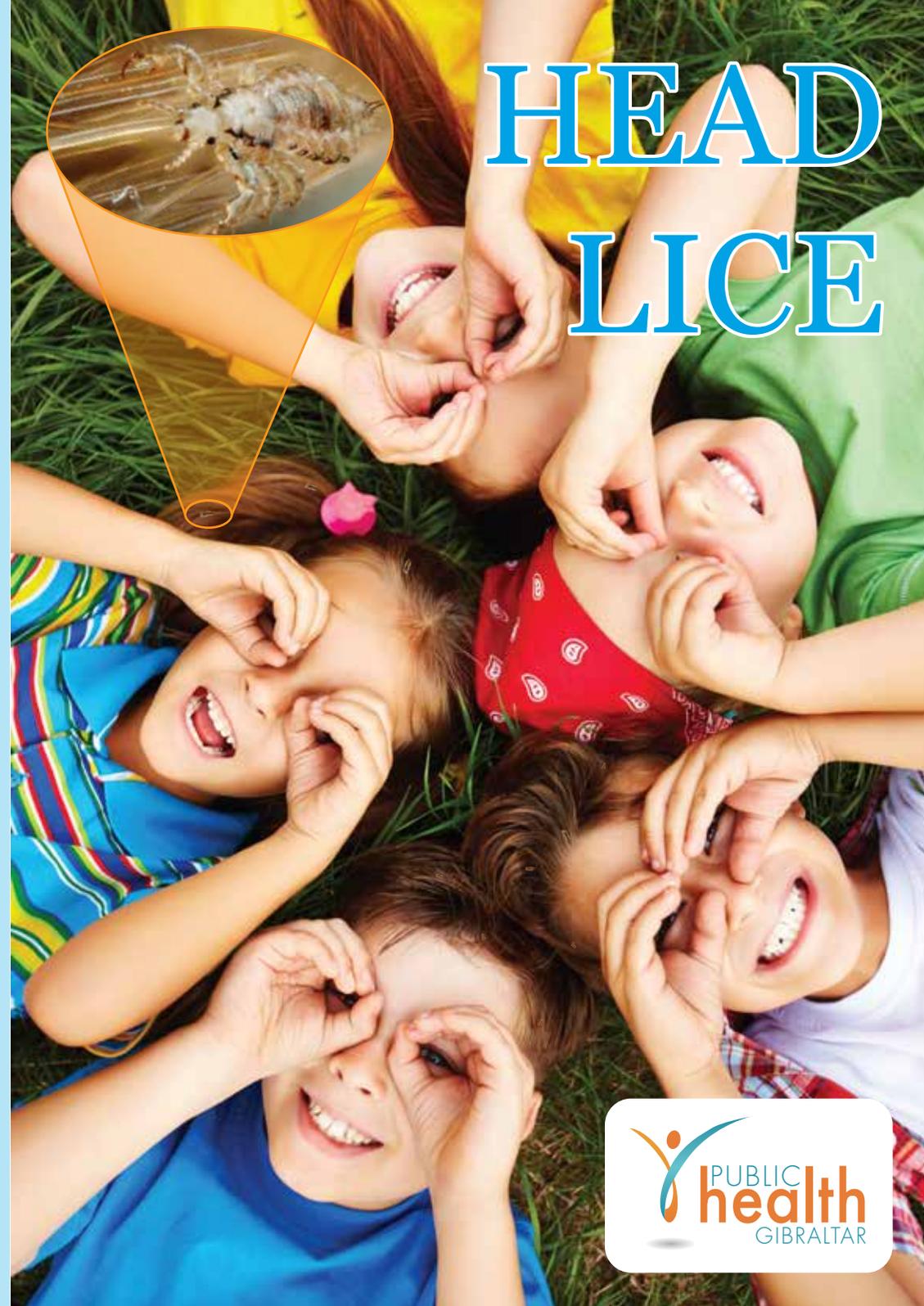
## Is there a problem in Gibraltar?

Not more than average. Numbers tend to rise and fall. All countries have lice and no one has eradicated them yet. But with concerted effort, their numbers can be kept under control.



Scanning electron microscope photograph of the egg and nymph of *Pediculus capitis*.

# HEAD LICE



# FACTS ABOUT LICE

## What are lice?

Lice are blood-sucking insects which only live on humans. They are tiny but visible to the eye. They hold onto human hairs with tiny claws at the end of their six legs. They come in three different forms :

**Head lice**, which usually live in the scalp, armpits, beard, and eye-brows

**Pubic lice** or "crabs", which are usually found on pubic hair

**Body lice**, which occur anywhere, but most often in armpits and around the waist.

The eggshells of lice ("nits"), which can be seen as white specks attached to hair, are quite firmly attached and not easy to remove.



## Why do they spread?

Lice need human blood to feed their young. Full grown lice climb rapidly from one person to another during close head to head contact. They are common amongst children and easily spread to the rest of the family.

## My children are always clean. Are they safe from lice?

No! Clean hair is no protection against head lice. Lice have no need of dirt. Anyone with hair on the scalp can catch them. There is a common belief that children with lice must come from unhygienic families – this is simply not true. All we can tell is that lice are more likely to occur on sociable children who have plenty of friends.

## Will I be informed when lice are "going around"?

Sometimes. Unfortunately, many people have feelings of disgust about lice infestation, so they tend to conceal it rather than alert others. For similar reasons, some childcare institutions may try to avoid getting involved so as not to scare away customers! Parents should not wait to be told and, should check their children regularly.

## My children have no symptoms, no itching, nothing.

### Are they free of lice?

Possibly. However, lice can be present for weeks before itching develops, if at all, so it is always a good idea to check your children's hair periodically. Head lice and nits are also not easily spotted just by looking, so wet combing is necessary.

## How can we get rid of head lice?

As lice are very small, they easily escape an ordinary comb. A fine-tooth comb is necessary. However, combing dry hair with a fine-tooth comb still does not work, as lice quickly move away when they detect the disturbance caused by a comb. The secret is wetness - really wet lice stay still and do not escape.

## What is wet combing?

Fine combing of the child's dripping wet hair is called wet combing and is the ideal technique. Wet combing can be facilitated by applying a small amount of an ordinary conditioner to the wet hair prior to combing. This makes the hair so slippery that the lice cannot grip and simply slide off.

There is one problem though. The egg-cases are tough and stick firmly to the hair, often remaining even after wet combing. However, these eggs hatch after a few days and if wet combing is repeated 3 times more at 4 day intervals, all the lice will be cleared. This is because you are removing the lice before they are full grown and able to lay more eggs. This programme of serial wet combings is called bug-busting.



Wet combing

J.Easter

## What is bug-busting?

To summarise, Bug-busting means:

- ◆ washing the hair with an ordinary shampoo and conditioner
- ◆ using a fine-toothed plastic comb ("Nit-comb") to remove the nits and lice
- ◆ repeating this technique every 4 days for 4 times: i.e., on days 1, 5, 9 and 13.

The technique is shown diagrammatically below

