

Cochrane Corner

Co-trimoxazole is an effective treatment for head lice

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The problem

You have tried pediculicides topically for head lice and find they are recurring or not going away.

Clinical bottom line

In patients with suspected head lice (clinical suspicion of lice or eggs) co-trimoxazole 10mg/kg/day in two divided doses for 10 days in addition to permethrin 1% cream topically for 10 minutes (repeated one week later) was better (92.5% vs 71.8%) than permethrin alone at four weeks. Cotrimoxazole works by killing the intestinal flora of the head lice via the blood they suck from the host.

Table 1. Suspected head lice

	Success	Evidence	Harms
Co-trimoxazole 10mg/kg/day in 2 doses for 10 days with permethrin repeated at one week	Combination better than permethrin alone NNT = 5	1 RCT ¹	Bone marrow problems with co-trimoxazole therefore only recommended in difficult cases.

NNT = numbers needed to treat to get the additional benefit.

References

1. Hipolito RB et al. Head lice infestation. *Pediatrics* 2001; 107:E30.

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