Head lice are only found on the human head or hair. Head lice do not live on furniture, hats, bedding, carpet or anywhere else in the environment. Treating anything other than the human head does not eradicate head lice.

Before you choose a treatment for head lice, consider the following:

- Make sure that the heads you treat are infested with head lice, otherwise do not treat them.
- Avoid treating babies for head lice or any scalp that is irritated or inflamed.
- Protect children's eyes when treating with any product.
- There is no preventative treatment available for head lice. Treating the whole family as a precaution contributes to head lice becoming resistant to the products used.
- Read the product label before applying and use as directed.
- Avoid using natural products like tea tree oil as treatment for head lice.
- Apply product and leave it for 20 minutes. Combs out with a good quality lice comb.
- If dead lice are found, that means product has worked. Retreat in 7 days to kill the nymphs that emerged from unhatched eggs.
- If you find live lice, which means treatment hasn't worked. Use another product or try the comb and conditioner method.
  Reduce transmission of head lice by tying hair back or braiding and by checking your children's hair.
- Keeping a good quality head lice comb in the shower should help anyone taking a shower to use the comb.
- Do not use insecticides, methylated spirits or kerosene on your child's head.

What's the comb and conditioner method?

Head lice breathe through small openings along their abdomens called spiracles. By coating the hair with something thick and slimy causes these openings to close over and shuts down the louse's breathing. A simple hair conditioner is recommended for this purpose.
Although this application of thick and slimy substance does not kill the louse, it slows them down so that they can be easily caught by the head lice comb.

Nitbusting at home
Nitbusting can be a time-consuming task. If Nitbusting at home with your child, do the following:

1. Try sitting the child between your legs on a low stool and play a video for kid’s entertainment for an hour while you work.
2. Wrap a towel or kitchen paper around the child's shoulders to catch conditioner spill.
3. Remove any scrunchies, ribbons clasps, etc. from the child's head and comb out plaits and braids.
4. Apply liberal amounts of conditioner to the scalp and massage it through all the hair shafts. Every hair has to be coated to ensure it reaches the lice.
5. Lice live close to the scalp, so make sure that you cover the hair shaft close to the scalp. You don’t have to work the conditioner onto the whole length of the hair. Combing will spread it well enough. The idea of the application is to restrict the movement of the head lice long enough for you to catch them with a comb.

6. After you've applied the conditioner, use a large comb to part small sections of the hair starting from the nape and working upwards toward the crown. Eggs are often found behind the ears and toward the back of the head. By using this method, you are more likely to find the head lice on top of and toward the front of the head.
7. When the hair is detangled and manageable, use a fine lice comb to comb out each section several times.
8. After each comb out, wipe the conditioner on the paper towel. If the child has head lice, you will see them on the towel.

9. Keep combing each section of hair until no further lice, nymphs or eggs appear on the paper towel. Often you will see lots of old egg casings that may take awhile to remove.

Once you have combed and recombed each section of hair, either re-plait or tie it back. Young boys may like their hair spiked. Retreat the hair after seven days to ensure that any immature head lice that have hatched since the initial
treatment are removed before they can lay more eggs.

Treating long hair
Depending on the hair length and type, it is often easier to neatly section long and thick hair before applying conditioner to avoid getting the hair into a terrible tangle.

1. Part long hair once from forehead to scalp, and use hair clips to keep the part in place.

2. Apply conditioner along the part line and massage in with the comb. This is to stop lice from crossing from one side of the head to the other.

3. Part the hair in a straight line from ear around scalp to centre part and clip or pin top section to crown of scalp.

4. Apply conditioner again to the part and massage in.

5. Apply more conditioner to loose hair down to nape of neck.

6. Use the head lice comb to comb out the conditioner. Start at the base of the hair shaft and comb down the length of the hair in one stroke.

7. Wipe the comb on a paper towel and check for lice. Lice are easily identified on the paper towel. Continue combing this section until you are certain you have covered the area several times.

8. Repeat the sectioning on the other side of the part towards the other ear.

9. After you’ve done these two sections, continue parting horizontally from the centre part sections of hair and apply conditioner and comb out as before.

Other things you should know
Head lice often congregate on the crown of the head, so that it is not until you reach these last sections of hair that you find adult lice. However, heads that are severely infested will have adult lice everywhere.

A good head lice comb should also remove nymphs, the stage between egg and adult louse. These can be difficult to identify with the naked eye, but appear as small insects on the paper towel.
Head Lice in Schools
Head Lice infestation is a common problem throughout the world in all socioeconomic groups. Considerable myth and misinformation surrounds head lice and their management. Studies have shown that around one in four primary school aged children in Australia have head lice.
- Nitbusters Head Lice in Schools Program

The NSW Department of Education and Communities have a number of resources available on their website to educate parents and kids about head lice. Please see links below for further information.

- Head Lice – Facts, Treatment and Tips

- Removing Head Lice and Nits

Useful Links/Contacts
- Head Lice Information Sheet

- Head Lice Detection Information Kit

- The Department of Medical Entomology, University of Sydney and Westmead Hospital
  http://medent.usyd.edu.au/

- Head Lice, Department of Health, Victoria

- The National Pediculosis Association Inc
  http://www.headlice.org/

To find the NSW Health Public Health Unit for your area please click on the following link: Contact Details for PHU Units

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