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Arch Dis Child 1998;**78**:288 (March)

Letters to the editor

Head lice in schoolchildren

EDITOR,—In his recent letter, Charlton raises concern that head lice can be transmitted on combs and drapes.¹ We agree this is so in certain circumstances: healthy lice, forcibly removed from the head will re-establish if they are allowed back on a head within one or two days of removal. Lice can be caught on a comb at one stroke and returned to the head at another. Most head lice are undamaged by combing. Combing dry hair can propel lice by electrostatic charge through the air. If they land unnoticed on a person's clothing or skin they will climb up to the head.

Thoroughly wet lice, however, appear dead and remain motionless until they dry off, which takes some time especially if they are bathed in ordinary hair conditioner; this provides ample time to remove them from a comb and dispose of them before they reactivate. The "bug busting" method mentioned in our review is entirely performed in wet hair and the carer is instructed to examine the comb for lice and remove them between each stroke.² This can usually be done by wiping on kitchen paper or rinsing; if any lice lodge between the teeth, a cocktail stick or nailbrush will ease them out. A white plastic cape is provided in the Bug Buster Kit to protect the patient and because any lice landing there can be easily wiped off. We agree that the education of hairdressers in these facts is important.

JOANNA IBARRA

Community Hygiene Concern, 160 Inderwick Road, London N8 9JT

DAVID M B HALL

Children's Hospital, Sheffield S10 2TH

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