

NITBUSTERS: HEADLICE IN SCHOOLS PROGRAM

The Nitbusters program is a NSW Health initiative to reduce the prevalence of headlice in the community. The project, developed in consultation with the NSW Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations and the NSW Department of Education and Training, educates school children and parents about headlice and how to screen for and treat them as a community.

The program is aimed not at eradicating headlice but at identifying and managing infestations. Nitbusters tries to educate communities through schools about the most effective ways to reduce populations of headlice by encouraging school 'Nitbuster days'. These days are coordinated by parent volunteers, who use a fine-toothed nit comb and white hair conditioner to both screen for and treat headlice.

As most parents realise, eliminating headlice completely is probably—for the moment at least—not realistic. However, learning a safe and effective and simple method of removing headlice can make the management of infestations a little easier. Nitbusters recommends that all families regularly practise this method of treatment. Keep a good quality nit comb in the shower and train children to use it every time they wash their hair, even if their heads are not itchy.

The Nitbusters program has held demonstration training days in a number of primary schools across New South Wales. Neighbouring schools were invited to attend these days and learn how to coordinate their own Nitbuster day.

Data is available from some of those demonstration schools. Over 3,000 primary school children have been screened. Of those screened, more than 24 per cent had infestations of headlice. This is similar to both Victoria and Queensland, where more than 20 per cent of primary school children have been reported to have headlice. Information on headlice, and the Nitbusters program, including how to run a Nitbuster day, is available at www.health.nsw.gov.au/headlice.

OVERVIEW OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH IMPLICATIONS OF COCKROACHES AND THEIR MANAGEMENT

Peter Miller and Bryce Peters
Department of Health Sciences
University of Technology, Sydney

BACKGROUND

There are approximately 4,000 species of cockroaches worldwide and 428 species in Australia.¹ The majority of these species are not pests but live in the wild, feeding on decaying vegetation or other organic matter, and they are important in recycling this material. A number of cockroaches have become pests and live in or around homes where they are omnivorous scavengers. The 2 most significant pest cockroaches worldwide are the German cockroach *Blattella germanica* (Linnaeus) and the American cockroach *Periplaneta americana* (Linnaeus).

There are health implications from these pests, as they move freely from areas that may harbour pathogenic organisms: for example, from sewers to food or food preparation surfaces. Cockroach allergens can also be responsible for asthma. This article describes the public health implications of cockroaches, and their

management, including consequences for the management of other pests.

THE COCKROACH SPECIES

The German cockroach *Blattella germanica*

The German cockroach is the most common cockroach in houses and apartments in Australia.² Adults are about 15 mm long and first instar nymphs (that is, the first nymphal stage) are about 3 mm long. They are able to live and breed in the numerous cracks and crevices and hiding places present in most kitchens, bathrooms and living areas. Their small size means that they are initially tolerated by human occupants, many of whom do not recognise early nymphal stages as cockroaches. Their rapid reproduction rate enables a few individuals to become a pest problem over one season, as each female produces a number of egg cases containing numerous eggs (Table 1). The egg cases are carried until just before the eggs hatch. This helps protect the egg cases and the eggs and is another factor in their success as pests.

Like other pest cockroaches, German cockroaches are nocturnal and forage for food and water at night when