Head Lice

Though a nuisance, head lice is not a communicable disease. It is a common problem among school age children and anyone can become infested. Personal hygiene or cleanliness has nothing to do with getting head lice. You can become alert to this condition in your own children by watching for signs such as severe itching of the scalp, especially in the hair over the ears and on the back of the neck.

Lice appear as tiny grayish-brown insects. They are smaller than fleas and move very quickly. They do not jump or fly and cannot survive on pets. The eggs, called nits, are laid close to the scalp on the hair shafts and are different from dandruff or dirt because the eggs are hard to pull off the hair. It is necessary to look at the entire head and scalp.

Head lice are mainly spread by direct contact with the hair of an infested person. The most common way to get head lice is by head-to-head contact with a person who already has head lice. Uncommonly transmission can occur through sharing items such as combs, brushes, scarves, sweaters, hats or other things that have come in close contact with the scalp or hair of an infested person, and should be discouraged.

Step 1: Treat only the person(s) infested with live lice

1. Treat with non-prescription medication, which can be purchased at most pharmacies and grocery stores. Follow the instructions on the label exactly.
2. Do not use a combination shampoo/conditioner, or conditioner before using lice medicine. Do not re-wash hair for 1-2 days after treating with the lice medicine.
3. Do not use extra amounts of the lice medication, mix head lice medications, or treat more often than recommended on the package. It can be dangerous when misused or overused.
4. Do not treat the infested person more than 2-3 times with the same medicine if it does not seem to be working. If you still find active, adult lice, seek the advice of your health care provider.
5. Remove all nits found within ¼” of scalp to prevent reinfestation.

Step 2: Treat the house

1. Machine wash and dry clothing, bed linens, and other items that the infested person wore or used during the 2 days before treatment using the hot water (130°F) laundry cycle and the high heat drying cycle. Clothing and items that are not washable can be dry-cleaned 
   OR sealed in a plastic bag and stored for two weeks.
2. Soak combs and brushes in hot (at least 130° F) water for 5-10 minutes.
3. Vacuum the floor, furniture and car seats.
4. Do not use bug or lice sprays; they can be toxic if inhaled or absorbed through the skin.

For more information go to www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head or contact a district nurse at 541-883-5000.