Head lice are tiny wingless insects that live on the scalp. They do not carry any diseases so are not a public health risk. Anyone can get head lice.

NITS
- Nits are eggs that are laid by a female louse and are firmly attached to the hair shaft.
- They are about the size of a pinhead and are often found along the forehead, back of the head and behind the ears and are within 1 cm of the scalp.
- The nits are grayish-white, tan or yellow. Some can be the same colour as hair, making them difficult to see.
- Nits hatch in 6-10 days.

ADULT LICE
- Lice are the size of a sesame seed and are tan to grayish-white in colour. They may look darker in people with dark hair.
- They need blood to survive and can live up to 30 days on the head but will die within 1-2 days if they fall off the head.

HOW IS HEAD LICE SPREAD?
- Head lice are spread mainly through direct head-to-head contact. When heads are close together lice crawl very quickly from one head to another. Lice cannot fly or jump.
- They may also be spread by sharing items such as combs and hats but this is less common.
- Head lice do not live on animals.

WHAT DO I LOOK FOR?
- Frequent itching and sores on the scalp from scratching.

There may be no symptoms. Check all family members for lice by:

- Using good lighting. Daylight is best, so try sitting by a window.
- Looking throughout the hair for lice. They can be difficult to see because they are small, hide within the hair and move very quickly.
- Using a magnifying glass and fine toothed comb can help.
- Looking for nits firmly attached to the hair shaft and within 1 cm of the scalp. Part the hair into small sections and move from one side of the head to the other. Nits can be confused with dandruff or hair spray droplets—they will not fall off if touched.
- Nits will only come off if they are pulled off with your finger nails or nit comb.
WHAT ABOUT OTHER TREATMENTS?

A number of household products such as mayonnaise, petroleum jelly, olive oil, tea tree oil, hair gel and vinegar or wet combing have been suggested as a treatment. These products show little proof of killing head lice and are not as effective as head lice shampoo.

Call the Health ACTION Line at 1-800-660-5853

Websites:
- www.healthunit.org
- http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/
- http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/head_lice

Adapted with permission from Middlesex-London Health Unit, Elgin St. Thomas Public Health & Oxford County Public Health

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