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Head Lice Prevention

The back-to-school season is upon us and, unfortunately, that also means that children may be exposed to head lice in the classrooms. According to the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC), infestation with head lice (*Pediculus humanus capitis*) is most common in the United States among preschool- and elementary school-age children and their caretakers. An estimated 6 million to 12 million infestations occur each year in the United States among children 3 to 11 years old.

Getting head lice is not related to the cleanliness of the person or his/her environment. Most people get head lice when they have head-to-head contact with someone who has head lice. Head-to-head contact lets the lice crawl from one head to another head. Such contact can be common among children during play at school, home and elsewhere (e.g., sports activities, playgrounds, camp, and slumber parties). The lice do not care whether the person has squeaky-clean hair or dirty hair. The lice are looking for human blood, which they need to survive. Head lice can also be transferred indirectly when hats, coats, and scarves are shared or when infested hair brushes/combs, bedding, towels or shower caps are shared.

The Iroquois County Public Health Department suggests the following steps be taken to help prevent and control the spread of head lice:

- Avoid head-to-head (hair-to-hair) contact during play and other activities.
- Don't share clothing such as hats, scarves, coats, sports uniforms, hair ribbons or barrettes.
- Don't share combs, brushes, or towels. Disinfect combs and brushes used by an infested person by soaking them in hot water for 5-10 minutes.
- Do not lie on beds, couches, pillows, carpets, or stuffed animals that have recently been in contact with an infested person.
- Treatment for head lice is recommended for persons diagnosed with an active infestation. All household members and other close contacts should be checked; those persons with evidence of an active infestation should be treated.
- Machine wash and dry clothing, bed linens, and other items that an infested person wore or used during the 2 days before treatment using the hot water cycle and the high heat drying cycles. Items that cannot be washed can be sealed in a plastic bag and stored for 2 weeks.
- Vacuum the floor and furniture, particularly where the infested person sat or lay.
- Do not use fumigant sprays or fogs; they are not necessary to control head lice and can be toxic if inhaled or absorbed through the skin.
- Teach children to avoid activities that may spread head lice.

Visit the CDC's website for more information: www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head