

Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

Nov. 11, 2011

**Jo Ann Wilczynski,
Prevention Services Director**

517-279-9561, ext. 143

Theresa Christner, Health Ed./Health Promotion Dir.

517-279-9561, ext. 144

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Heading Off Head Lice

With schools in session and cold weather quickly upon us, the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency wants to remind parents of a common health problem that is creeping up in area classrooms. Head lice, also known as *Pediculus humanus capiti*, is a parasite that can be found on the head, eyebrows, and eyelashes of people. Head lice feed on human blood several time a day and live close to the human scalp. While a nuisance, head lice are not known to spread disease.

According to Jo Ann Wilczynski, Prevention Service Director at the local health department, "This is the time of year when we begin to see an increase in the reporting of head lice cases. During September and October, tri-county area schools reported 88 cases of head lice in their student populations. While this is quite normal, it does mean that parents and teachers should be on the look out for these pesky, little bugs."

Tell-tale signs that your child or family member has been infected by head lice include:

- Lots of head scratching, which can be caused by an allergic reaction to the bites;
- Sores on the head as a result of excessive scratching. Sometimes the sores can become infected;
- Signs of nits or lice eggs, which are yellow or white and smaller than a grain of rice. These are sometimes confused with dandruff, but unlike dandruff, they stick to the hair shaft.

- Visible signs of live nymphs (baby lice) or adult lice on the scalp.

Jo Ann went on to say “Head lice is preventable and if contracted, is not difficult to eliminate. Having head lice does NOT mean the person has poor hygiene or low social status. In fact, it is common childhood problem.” To avoid getting head lice, Jo Ann suggests parents should instruct their children as follows:

- DO NOT share coats, scarves, hats or hair accessories
- DO NOT share brushes, combs or towels
- DO NOT lay on an infested pillow, stuffed animal, bedding or carpet.

If you find live nymphs or lice or nits, the health department recommends treating that child or adult promptly and thoroughly. There are several over the counter lotions and shampoos that work well. If these do not work, a doctor can give you a prescription for stronger medicine. Such medicine should be used exactly as directed. To use the medicine shampoo:

- First rinse and dry the hair.
- Then apply the medicine to the hair and scalp.
- After 10 minutes, rinse it off.
- Put on clean clothes after treatment
- Using a Nit comb (very fine tooth comb) remove all the nits from the hair. Rubbing olive oil in the hair first may make removing the nits easier.
- Re-treat as necessary, especially for long or thick hair.
- Check treated person for 2 to 3 weeks until you are sure all nits and lice are gone.

In addition, parents should treat their household by:

- 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 (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 2 weeks.

- Vacuum the floor and furniture, particularly where the infested person sat or lay. However, spending much time and money on housecleaning activities are not necessary to avoid re-infestation by lice or nits that may have fallen off the head or crawled onto furniture or clothing.

To learn more about natural ways to prevent and/or control the spread of head lice, check the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency website at www.bhsj.org and click on Frequently Asked Questions.