What are head lice?
Head lice are very small, less than 1/8 inch long, tan colored insects that live on the human head. They live and lay their eggs, called nits, close to the scalp. The nits are tiny and are gray, white or brown. The nits are firmly cemented to the hair shaft.

Who can get head lice?
Anyone can get head lice. They are not a sign of being dirty and do not reflect poorly upon parents. Head lice are a common problem any place where there are groups of children, such as child care settings and schools.

What are the symptoms of head lice?
Itching and scratching of the scalp and neck are usually the first sign that head lice are present. The areas most often affected are behind the ears and the back of the neck. If lice or nits are found on the head of one person in a household, the heads of all household members should be checked. Look for crawling lice in the hair near the scalp and nits glued to the hair shafts. They are usually found within 1/2 inch of the scalp.

When do the symptoms appear?
It may take two to three weeks before the intense itching is noticed.

How are head lice spread?
Head lice are passed from person to person by direct contact, on shared personal items (combs, brushes, hats, scarves, sports headgear, jackets and other clothing) or by contact with infested bedding, furniture, or carpeting. Head lice do not fly or jump. They crawl and can fall off the head. Lice do not usually live longer than 48 hours off the head. They only lay their eggs while on the head. It is unlikely that the nits will hatch into insects after they have fallen off the head. Lice do not spread to pets, and you cannot get them from pets.

What is the treatment for head lice?
Lice control products come in the form of shampoos, creme rinses and lotions. Some products are available over the counter from a drug store and some are only available by prescription. If you are on medical assistance, contact your physician for a prescription. **Contact a physician before using any lice control product on an infant, or a woman who is pregnant or breast feeding.** It is recommended that the hair first be washed with a shampoo that does not contain a conditioner or creme rinse. Baby shampoo and Prell are two good examples. The head should be rinses as usual. Some products are to be used on a dry head, others on a head that is damp. Only those people with actual lice or nits should be treated, because use of these products will not prevent someone from getting head lice.
Follow the directions carefully. The directions are not the same for every product. The lice don't always die immediately. It might take up to 24 hours. If live lice are seen two days after treatment, retreat with a different brand. It is recommended that all nits be removed as part of the treatment. A special fine toothed comb is usually included with the product, or can be purchased separately. However, many people feel that the most effective way to remove nits is with fingernails. There are also nit loosening products that you can use after the lice treatment shampoo. Be sure to clean your fingernails thoroughly with hot soapy water and scrape under