

**Mission:**

To protect, promote & improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county & community efforts.



**Rick Scott**  
Governor

**John H. Armstrong, MD, FACS**  
State Surgeon General & Secretary

**Vision:** To be the **Healthiest State** in the Nation

## HEAD LICE

**What is Head Lice?**

Head lice are small brown insects the size of sesame seeds that live and feed on the human scalp. The female louse lays eggs, called nits, on the hair close to the scalp. The nits, which look like tiny, whitish ovals that are firmly glued to the hair shafts, usually hatch within two weeks.

**What are the signs and symptoms of a Head Lice infection?**

The most common symptom of lice infestation is itching and irritation of the scalp, often nits may be glued to hair just behind the ears, and at the nape of the neck. Scratching can lead to sores on the scalp or around the neck and ears.

**How are Head Lice infections spread?**

Lice are spread by direct contact with an infected person and indirect contact by sharing personal items such as hats, combs, coats, and clothing. If left untreated, lice will quickly spread and is considered highly contagious.

**What is the incubation period of Head Lice and how long is it contagious?**

The eggs of lice, also called nits, are firmly attached to the hair shaft. Nits hatch in 10 to 14 days. Lice can be transferred to another person as long as lice or eggs remain alive on the infested person and their personal belongings.

**What should I do if I think I have a Head Lice infection?**

Any child with head lice must be treated before returning to school. Over-the-counter or prescription shampoos are available for treatment and should be used as directed. Check the child daily after treatment for lice, eggs, and intense head scratching. Check the heads of other children and adults in your family to be sure they are not infected. Orange County has a “no nit” policy. A “no nit” policy in schools helps to control an infestation and keeps children at home until all nits are removed. This policy ensures there is no sign of re-infestation.

**How can I prevent myself and others from getting a Head Lice infection?**

Infestation can be prevented by avoiding physical contact with infected individuals and their belongings. Wash all infested bedding and clothing in hot water or run through your dryer for at least 30 minutes. Place items that cannot be cleaned or placed in a dryer into a tightly sealed plastic bag for 10-14 days. Remember to vacuum carpet, including furniture.

For more information, contact the Florida Department of Health in Orange County Epidemiology Program at 407-858-1420. You may also visit the Epidemiology Program website, <http://orchd.com/generalHealth/epidemiology/index.asp>, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website, <http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/lice/head/>, or the DOH-Orange School Health website at <http://orchd.com/personalHealth/schoolHealth/index.asp> for additional information.

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