



Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease

What is Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease?

Hand, foot, and mouth disease, or HFMD, is a contagious illness that is caused by different viruses.

What are the signs and symptoms?

Symptoms usually begin with a fever, reduced appetite, sore throat, and a feeling of being unwell. A day or two after the fever starts painful sores can develop in the mouth. A skin rash with flat red spots may also develop on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet. Sometimes a rash also occurs on the knees, elbows, and buttocks. This rash may blister but won't itch. Not everyone will get all of these symptoms. Other people may show no symptoms at all, but they can still pass the virus to others.

Who gets HFMD?

Infants and children younger than 5 years old are more likely to get this disease. However, older children and adults can also get it. When someone gets HFMD, they develop immunity to the specific virus that caused their infection. However, because HFMD is caused by several different viruses, people can get the disease again.

Is HFMD serious?

HFMD is usually not serious. The illness is typically mild, and nearly all patients recover in 7 to 10 days without medical treatment. Complications are uncommon.

Is HFMD contagious?

Yes. The viruses that cause HFMD can be found in an infected person's nose and throat secretions (such as saliva, sputum, or nasal mucus), blister fluid, and feces (stool).

HFMD spreads from an infected person to others through: close contact, such as kissing, hugging, or sharing cups and eating utensils, coughing and sneezing, contact with feces, for example when changing a diaper, contact with blister fluid, and touching objects or surfaces that have the virus on them.

People with HFMD are most contagious during the first week of their illness. However, they may be contagious for weeks after symptoms go away. Some people, especially adults, may not develop any symptoms, but can still spread the viruses to others.

Should a person with HFMD be isolated?

As HFMD is contagious (which means it can be passed on to others) children with HFMD should be excluded from school until it is determined that they can return by a physician. Further exclusion may apply if a large number of children are affected.

How do I prevent HFMD?

There is no vaccine to protect against HFMD. However, you can reduce the risk of getting infected with the viruses that cause HFMD by following a few simple steps:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for 20 seconds, especially after changing diapers;
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands,
- Avoid close contact (kissing, hugging, sharing cups and eating utensils) with people who are infected.
- Disinfect frequently touched surfaces (toys, doorknobs, etc.), especially if someone is sick.

What type of treatment and care should be given?

There is no specific treatment for HFMD. Fever and pain can be managed with over-the-counter fever reducers and pain relievers, such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen. It is important for people with HFMD to drink enough fluids to prevent dehydration (loss of body fluids).

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