



Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease

What is hand-foot-and-mouth disease?

Hand, foot, and mouth disease (HFMD), is a generally mild disease caused by a group of viruses called Coxsackie Viruses.

Who is at risk?

HFMD mainly affects infants and young children (less than 5 years old) but can also occur in older children and adults.

How is hand, foot and mouth disease spread?

The disease is spread from person to person through coughing; sneezing; close contact; contact with infected faeces, such as can happen when changing a diaper; and touching surfaces or objects which have been contaminated with the virus. Outbreaks of HFMD often occur where young children are constantly in close contact with each other, such as schools, day cares and nurseries.

What are the symptoms of hand, foot and mouth disease?

Symptoms usually begin with a fever, sore throat, reduced appetite and a general feeling of being unwell. Within a day or two after the first symptoms, a rash and bumps may appear on the soles of the feet, palms of the hands and inside the mouth. A rash may also develop on the elbows, knees and buttocks. The bumps may blister but do not cause itching. Some persons may have the disease but do not show any symptoms and can still pass the virus on to others. The illness is usually mild and persons usually recover from the disease between 7 to 10 days.

Is there a vaccine?

There is no vaccine to protect against the viruses that cause hand, foot, and mouth disease.

How is HFMD treated?

There is no specific treatment for HFMD. Symptoms can be treated to provide relief. Acetaminophen or ibuprofen can be used to manage the fever and pain. Persons with the disease need to drink enough fluids to prevent dehydration. Cold liquids are usually preferable, however, spicy and acidic foods should be avoided as they may cause discomfort.



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How can I prevent the spread of HFMD?

To reduce the risk of getting infected with HFMD and prevent the spread of the disease:

- Wash hands often with soap and water, especially after changing diapers. Adults should help young children do the same.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Disinfect surfaces and objects, such as toys and doorknobs
- Avoid close contact such as hugging, kissing and sharing eating utensils with persons who have HFMD

It is important to note that Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease is a **different** disease from Foot and Mouth Disease which mainly affects animals such as cattle and swine.