

## Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease

### What is Hand, Foot and Mouth disease?

Hand, Foot and Mouth disease is caused by certain types of viruses called Coxsackie virus or Enteroviruses. Children under ten years old catch the infection most often. Most infections happen in the summer and early fall.

### What are the symptoms?

The symptoms start three to five days after contact with an infected person. The first sign of infection may be a fever, sometimes with a runny nose or sore throat. The fever may rise as high as 40° C (104° F), but it is generally lower. The fever can last up to seven days.

About two days after the fever starts, small sores may develop on the inside of the mouth. A day or two later, small red spots may appear on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet. These red spots may turn into blisters. The fever, spots and blisters all usually go away after about seven to ten days.

Not everyone who gets Hand, Foot and Mouth disease gets all of these symptoms. Sometimes a person can have the infection and have no symptoms.

### How is it spread?

Once the person is sick, he or she can spread the virus for about seven to ten days. The virus is spread by contact with airborne droplets from the nose and throat through coughing or direct contact. Because the virus stays for some time in the bowels of an infected person, Hand, Foot and Mouth disease can also be spread for up to three weeks if there is oral (mouth) contact with feces (bowel movements).

This disease spreads very easily in child care settings and other places where children are close together. So, take extra care to wash hands and thoroughly clean surfaces after changing diapers and before serving or eating food around children and child care settings.

### How can the spread of the disease be reduced?

Encourage children to cover their mouth and nose when they cough or sneeze to prevent spread of airborne droplets. They should also wash their hands often to avoid spreading the virus to others. Encourage children to throw tissues directly in the garbage after use and to wash their hands again.

The child will be contagious during the course of the illness, usually about seven to ten days, and good hygiene is extremely important. It is possible your child may be contagious for several weeks after the blisters and sores have healed because the virus may remain in the feces.

Your child may continue to attend daycare if he or she feels well enough, as the risk to other children is not great.

Continue to practice careful hygiene for several weeks or months after the child is better.

### How is it treated?

When necessary, the fever from Hand, Foot and Mouth disease can be reduced with acetaminophen. Ask your family doctor how much to use, or read the instructions on the bottle carefully. Do *not* give ASA (Aspirin<sup>®</sup>, acetylsalicylic acid) to a child or teenager due to the danger of Reye's syndrome. Antibiotics will *not* help treat or cure this disease.

Do not pop the blisters - they will heal better if left alone. Because the mouth sores can be painful, your child may not want to eat or drink. These sores can be treated with an ointment used for teething. You can place some ointment on your finger and gently apply to child's sores. Wash your hands after applying the ointment. Use these products in moderation. If swallowed

frequently, a child's throat could become numb and cause difficulty swallowing.

Give your child only cold, bland liquids like milk or water. Give your child only bland, cool and soft foods like bread, noodles, or perhaps a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. Don't give fizzy or tart drinks like pop and fruit juice, as these will sting.

Remember, if Hand, Foot and Mouth disease is suspected, encourage proper hygiene, frequent hand washing and other basic cleanliness to prevent its spreading by contact with airborne droplets from the mouth or nose, or with feces.



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