



FACT SHEET

Hand, Foot, & Mouth Disease

Hand, Foot, & Mouth Disease is a mild viral illness of infants and children.

It is moderately contagious, and spreads from person to person by direct contact with nose and throat discharges or the stool of infected persons.

Effective personal protective measures include frequent handwashing and washing of soiled clothing and surfaces.

WHAT IS HAND, FOOT, & MOUTH DISEASE?

Hand, foot, and mouth disease (HFMD) is a mild viral illness of infants and children that occurs most often in summer and early autumn. Children under 10 years of age are most susceptible, but the disease can spread to other family members, including adults.

Many different viruses cause HFMD. Coxsackievirus A16 is the most common, but Enterovirus 71 or other strains of coxsackieviruses can cause HFMD also.

IS HFMD THE SAME AS FOOT-AND-MOUTH DISEASE?

No. HFMD is different than foot-and-mouth disease seen in cattle, sheep, and swine. Although the names are similar, the two diseases are not related at all and are caused by different viruses.

HOW IS HFMD TRANSMITTED?

HFMD is transmitted by direct contact with nose and throat discharges or with droplets from coughing or sneezing. The disease is also transmitted by contact with stool from diaper changing. Children with HFMD are most contagious during the first week of illness. HFMD is not transmitted to or from pets or other animals.

HOW SOON CAN SOMEONE BECOME ILL AFTER GETTING INFECTED?

The usual time from infection to the start of symptoms is 3 to 5 days. Fever is commonly the first symptom of HFMD.

Everyone can get the HFMD infection. Some persons may previously have had HFMD infection with mild or no symptoms at all. These persons will have immunity to the specific virus, but may get infection with a different HFMD virus.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF HFMD?

Persons with HFMD have a fever of 38-39°C (100-102°F), for 1 to 2 days. Sores occur on the tongue, gums and inside the cheeks. A blistering skin rash may also occur, usually on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet. The rash does not itch. Most persons complain of sore throat or sore mouth, and young children may refuse to eat.

Coxsackievirus A16 causes a mild form of HFMD. In rare instances, this illness may be associated with "aseptic" or viral meningitis, in which a person has fever, headache, stiff neck, or back pain and may need to be hospitalized.

Enterovirus 71 may also cause "aseptic" meningitis and, rarely, more serious diseases of the central nervous system.

HFMD is usually not serious; almost all patients recover without medical treatment in 7 to 10 days.

If your child is experiencing any signs other than mild fever or rash, see your health care provider immediately.

WHAT CAN I DO TO PREVENT HFMD ?

The best ways to prevent the spread of HFMD include:

- Frequent handwashing, especially after changing diapers and before eating;
- Washing articles of clothing that have been soiled by nose and throat discharges or by stool;
- Disinfection of surfaces that have nose and throat discharges or stool from a person who has HFMD. A good household cleaner that works well is diluted bleach solution, made by mixing 1 capful of household bleach containing chlorine with 1 gallon (3.8 liters) of water;
- For children in childcare or school, extra emphasis should be placed on handwashing and cleaning/disinfection of soiled surfaces and clothing.

Fact sheet available:
www.chppmeur.amedd.army.mil

References and more Information:

1. Control of Communicable Diseases Manual. 17th Edition, 2000. American Public Health Association.
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases
3. Mandell, Douglas, and Bennett's Principles and Practice of Infectious Diseases. 5th Ed, 2000. Churchill Livingstone.