

Hand, Foot, and Mouth Disease

What is Hand, Foot, and Mouth Disease (HFMD)?

Hand, foot, and mouth disease (HFMD) is a common viral infection that affects infants and children (usually < 5 years of age) but can happen at any age.

The most common cause of HFMD is coxsackie virus A16; but it can sometimes be caused by other strains of this same virus or enterovirus 71.

HFMD has generally mild symptoms, and goes away on its own. Complications are rare, but can include viral meningitis, or inflammation of the brain. Persons with fever, headache, stiff neck/ back pain should seek medical attention.

HFMD is often thought to be the same as "foot and mouth disease". Foot and mouth disease is a virus infection in cattle, sheep, and swine. Even though the names are similar, it is caused by a different virus. Humans can not get foot and mouth disease.



Signs and Symptoms of HFMD

Once an individual has become infected, symptoms begin 3-7 days later. Common symptoms of HFMD include:

- fever
- headache
- sore throat
- loss of appetite
- lack of energy
- small painful blisters inside the mouth (back of mouth), tongue and gums that lasts for 4-6 days
- red spots, often with small blisters on top may appear on the palms of the hands, fingers and on the soles of the feet for 7-10 days
- sometimes the rash appears on other parts of the body, such as the elbows, knees and buttocks



Is HFMD Contagious?

Yes, HFMD is contagious. Infection is spread from one person to another by droplets and direct contact with nose and throat secretions (e.g. sputum, saliva, nasal mucus), fluid from the blisters and the stool of infected persons.

- Touching objects (e.g. toys, tables, door handles or other surfaces) that have been touched by the infected person (the surfaces are contaminated with the virus).
- Breathing in air contaminated with the virus after an infected person has coughed or sneezed.
- Touching the nose and throat secretions or stool of an infected person and then touching own eyes, nose or mouth.

A person is most contagious during the first week of the illness. The virus lives for weeks in a person's body so it is possible to pass the infection to others even after the symptoms have disappeared. Persons also can be infected but never have symptoms. These persons too can pass the virus on to others. HFMD is not passed to or from pets or other animals.



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How to Reduce the Spread of HFMD?

- Clean your hands often with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand rub with at least 60% alcohol.
- Avoid sharing eating and drinking utensils (e.g. forks/spoons, plates, cups) with persons who have HFMD.
- Avoid close contact such as hugging or kissing with persons who have HFMD.
- Cough or sneeze into a Kleenex. Throw away the Kleenex right after using it and clean hands.
- Disinfect dirty surfaces and soiled items (e.g. toys). First wash the items with soap and water. Then disinfect with a solution of chlorine bleach (made by mixing 1 tablespoon of bleach and 4 cups of water). This solution should be made daily as it gets weaker over time. Make sure the solution is kept away from children. Rinse the toys well with water after using the bleach solution.

Currently there is no vaccine or medicine that will prevent HFMD. These activities may reduce the spread of the infection, but they will not completely prevent it.

What is Recommended?

- Children are able to attend child care programs, schools, or other group settings, if they are feeling well enough to do so (e.g. have no fever).
- Drink fluids to stay hydrated. If mouth sores are making it too painful to swallow and the person is not getting enough fluids, talk with your healthcare provider.
- Persons who are worried about the symptoms should talk with their healthcare provider.

How is HFMD Diagnosed?

Healthcare providers are able to tell the difference between HFMD and other causes of mouth sores by looking at the age of the patient, the types of sores/blisters, and the appearance of the rash and sores.

Can HFMD be Treated?

There is no treatment for HFMD. Antibiotics will not treat the infection because it is caused by a virus. The symptoms of HFMD can be lessened by:

- Using medication from the pharmacy to relieve the fever and pain (***Do Not give aspirin to children**)
- Using mouthwashes or sprays that relieve mouth pain (ask a pharmacist)
- Get plenty of rest

If you have any questions,
please contact Telehealth at
1-866-797-0000



References: