



FACT SHEET: HAND, FOOT & MOUTH DISEASE

Hand, foot and mouth disease (HFMD) is caused by certain types of viruses. It should not be confused with Foot and Mouth disease, which is seen in pigs, sheep and cattle. These two illnesses come from different viruses.

WHAT IS HAND, FOOT & MOUTH DISEASE?

Hand, foot, and mouth disease is a common viral illness that usually affects infants and children younger than 5 years old. However, it can sometimes occur in older children and adults. Most cases occur in the summer and early fall.

Hand, foot and mouth disease is not a serious illness and complications are rare.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Symptoms start 3 to 6 days after contact with an infected person. The first symptoms of infection may include:

- Mild fever
- Loss of appetite
- Feeling tired
- Sore throat
- Runny nose

About 2 days after the fever starts, small painful blisters may develop in the mouth, on the tongue or on the gums. A day or 2 later, a rash of red spots with blisters may appear on the palms of

the hands, the bottom of the feet and sometimes on the buttocks. The spots and blisters usually last for 7 to 10 days.

Not everyone will get all of these symptoms. Some people, especially adults, may show no symptoms at all, but they can still pass the virus to others.

HOW IS IT SPREAD?

Hand, foot and mouth disease spreads from person to person through contact with someone's nose and throat secretions (saliva, nasal mucous), fluid from the blisters, or stool (feces).

The virus can be spread through close personal contact such as kissing, or sharing drinking cups, forks, or spoons. It can also spread through droplets in the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes. You can be infected by inhaling these droplets or touching objects contaminated with them. You can also be infected by touching surfaces contaminated with fluid from the blisters or fecal matter.

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A person can shed the virus from their respiratory tract for about a week and in their stool for several weeks. Some people excreting the virus, including most adults, have no symptoms at all.

HOW IT CAN BE PREVENTED

There is no vaccine or medication that prevents hand, foot and mouth disease.

You can lower the chance of getting sick with hand, foot and mouth disease by doing the following:

- **Wash hands** often with soap and water, especially after changing diapers, using the toilet and before serving or eating food.
- **Cover your cough.** Teach your child to cover their mouth and nose when they cough or sneeze.
- **Clean and disinfect** frequently touched surfaces and soiled items, including toys.
- **Stay at home when you are sick.** Keeping sick children at home can lower the chance of spreading the illness to other children at school, day care or playgroups. Children who feel well enough to go to school, day care etc. can return even if they still have the rash.
- **Avoid close contact** such as kissing, hugging, or sharing eating utensils or cups with people with hand, foot, and mouth disease.

HOW IT IS TREATED

There is no treatment for hand, foot and mouth disease. Your health care provider may recommend an over-the-counter drug such as acetaminophen (Tylenol) for fever or pain.

REFERENCES

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MORE INFORMATION



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