

# Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease

## What is Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease?

Hand, foot and mouth disease is a common illness that affects infants and children. It is one virus among several viruses known as an enterovirus group. You may hear this virus called HFMD.

## Who Can Get Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease?

Anyone can get hand, foot and mouth disease but it most often affects children age 5 years and younger. It is possible to get it a second time if infected with another virus from the enterovirus group.

## How can Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease Spread?

Infection is spread from person to person by:

- coughing or sneezing
- touching hands, objects or surfaces contaminated with stool
- touching fluid from blisters.

A person is most contagious (able to spread the disease) during the first week of illness. Hand, foot and mouth disease is not passed to or from animals.

## What are Symptoms of Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease?

Symptoms of hand, foot and mouth disease start from 3 to 5 days after infection.

Symptoms include:

- fever (often the first symptom)
- sore throat
- sores in the mouth
- rash with blisters (most often on hands and feet but the rash can be on the buttocks, legs and arms)
- poor appetite
- feeling unwell.

Usually, infection causes a mild disease and people recover in 7 to 10 days without treatment.

It is rare, but a person with hand, foot and mouth disease can get viral meningitis.

Symptoms include:

- fever
- headache
- stiff neck
- back pain.

Call your health care provider if you have these symptoms. (You may need to stay in the hospital for a few days.)

**(over)**

## How is Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease Found?

Your health care provider will:

- look at you or your child's mouth sores, rash or both
- talk with you about the symptoms
- take a throat swab, stool sample or both.

## How is Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease Treated?

There is no specific treatment. Your health care provider can suggest relief for fever, aches or pain from mouth sores.

## What Prevents the Spread of the Germ?

The risk of infection can be lowered by:

- washing your hands with soap and warm water often (especially after diaper changes)
- covering your nose and mouth when you sneeze or cough
- cleaning and disinfecting commonly touched surfaces and shared items such as door knobs or toys
- avoiding touching your eyes, nose and mouth.

## How Long Should Infected People Stay Home From Work or School?

You may return to daycare or school as long as they:

- don't have a fever
- have drooling from mouth sores under control
- feel well enough to participate in normal activities.

**Information adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.**