

Hand foot and mouth disease - coxsackie virus

Hand foot and mouth disease (HFMD) is a viral infection. It is not linked to the foot and mouth disease that affect animals. HFMD is mainly seen in children under the age of 10 or in young adults. It is easily spread from one person to another. Most people have had HFMD by the time they are adults. It rarely causes further complications and is very rarely fatal.

Signs and symptoms

Symptoms usually start three to seven days after catching the infection and can last from seven to 10 days. Admission to hospital is rarely needed. The common signs and symptoms include:

- high temperature (fever)
- sore throat
- small blisters on the inside of the mouth, the sides of the tongue, palms of the hands, fingers, soles of the feet and nappy area (the blisters should not be itchy like chickenpox blisters)
- poor appetite (drinking and eating can be painful because of the mouth blisters)
- tiredness.



How is it spread?

The main way HFMD is spread is by touching the fluid from inside the blisters or fluids from the nose, mouth and chest spread from sneezing and coughing. It can also be in bowel movements (poo) for up to several weeks after a person has been infected.

How to stop it spreading

- Washing hands after touching these bodily fluids is the best way to prevent the spread of HFMD.
- Not sharing items such as cutlery, drinking cups, towels, toothbrushes and clothing will help to reduce the spread to others.
- Your child should stay home from school, crèche, playgroup, kindergarten or child care until all the fluid in the blisters has dried.

Causes

Hand foot and mouth disease is caused by a group of viruses known as enteroviruses. It is most commonly caused by the coxsackie virus A 16, with the virus EV 71 being less common.

Treatment

- There is no treatment for HFMD. Because it is a virus, antibiotics will not work to treat it.
- Give pain relief for mouth blisters. Ask your pharmacist or family doctor about what medicines are good to use.
- Give your child frequent sips of drinks. This will stop them from becoming dehydrated.
- Leave blisters to dry naturally. Do not pierce or squeeze them.
- If your child gets a headache, stiff neck or back pain seek medical advice immediately from your family doctor or nearest hospital emergency department.

Key points to remember

- Hand foot and mouth disease is easily spread from one person to another.
- It is not life threatening.
- There are no specific treatments, vaccine or cure.
- If your child has symptoms of a headache, stiff neck or back pain, seek medical advice immediately.
- There is no known risk to pregnant women or their unborn babies.

For more information

- Your family doctor (GP) or Maternal and Child Health Nurse
- www.health.vic.gov.au/ideas
- www.cdc.gov/ncidod/
- www.health.nsw.gov.au
- Better Health Channel www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

This fact sheet produced in consultation with Emergency Department and Infection Control Department. First published Oct 2006. Updated November 2010.

References: National Center for Infectious Diseases, Respiratory and Enteric Viruses Branch (USA)

www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/revb/enterovirus/hfhf.htm

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