



Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease

What is Hand, Foot and Mouth disease?

Hand, foot and mouth disease is caused by certain types of viruses. Children under 10 years of age get the disease most often. Most cases occur in the summer and early fall.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms start 3 to 5 days after contact with an infected person. The first sign of infection may be a fever, sometimes with a runny nose or sore throat. The fever may rise as high as 40° C (104° F), but it is generally lower. The fever can last up to 7 days.

In addition, an infected person may have other symptoms. About 2 days after the fever starts, small painful blisters may develop on the inside of the mouth, on the tongue or on the gums. A day or 2 later, small red spots may appear on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet. These red spots may turn into blisters. The fever, spots, and blisters usually go away after about 7 to 10 days.

Not everyone who has hand, foot and mouth disease will get all of these symptoms. Sometimes a person can have the infection and have no symptoms.

How is it spread?

Once a person is infected and sick, he or she can be contagious and spread the virus for about 7 to 10 days. The virus is spread by coughing or direct contact with airborne droplets from the nose and throat. Hand, foot and mouth disease can also be spread for up to 3 weeks if there is oral (mouth) contact with feces (bowel movements). The virus stays for some time in the bowels of an infected person.

This disease spreads very easily in child care settings and other places where children are close together. Therefore, take extra care to wash hands and clean surfaces thoroughly after changing diapers and before serving or eating food around children and child care settings.

How can you prevent the disease?

Teach children to sneeze or cough into a tissue or their inner arm where the elbow flexes. This prevents the spread of airborne droplets. They should also wash their hands often to avoid spreading the virus to others. Encourage children to throw tissues directly in the garbage after use and to wash their hands again.

Good hygiene is extremely important. You or your child will be contagious during the course of the illness, usually about 7 to 10 days. It is possible you or your child may be contagious for several weeks after the blisters and sores have healed because the virus may remain in the feces.

Your child may continue to attend daycare if he or she feels well enough to take part in activities, as the risk to other children is not great.

Continue to practice careful hygiene for several weeks or months after your child feels better.

How is it treated?

When necessary, the fever from hand, foot and mouth disease can be reduced with acetaminophen (such as Tylenol®). Ask your family doctor the dose to use, or read the instructions on the package or bottle carefully. Do *not* give ASA (Aspirin®, acetylsalicylic acid) to a child or teenager due to the danger of Reye's syndrome. Antibiotics will *not* help treat or cure this disease.

Do not pop the blisters - they will heal better if left alone. Because the mouth sores can be painful, your child may not want to eat or drink. These sores can be treated with an ointment used for teething. You can place some ointment on your finger and gently apply to your child's sores. Wash your

hands before and after applying the ointment. Use these products in moderation. If swallowed frequently, a child's throat could become numb, and this could cause difficulty swallowing.

Give your child only cold, bland liquids such as milk or water. Do not give fizzy or tart drinks such as pop and fruit juice. These will sting. Give your child only bland, cool and soft foods like bread, noodles, or perhaps a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

Remember, if hand, foot and mouth disease is suspected, encourage proper hygiene, frequent hand washing, and other basic cleanliness to prevent it from spreading to others.



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