

HAND, FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE

What is hand, foot and mouth disease?

Hand, foot and mouth disease is a contagious disease caused by a coxsackievirus. While anyone at any age can get it, it is most common in children under 10 years of age. Most cases occur during the summer and early fall. Hand, foot and mouth disease is different from the foot and mouth disease that causes infection in animals.

What are the symptoms of hand, foot and mouth disease?

Symptoms usually start with a fever, and after one or two days, small, painful blisters appear in the mouth. These blisters are usually inside the cheeks, on the gums and on the sides of the tongue resulting in pain when eating or drinking, which can lead to dehydration.

Typically, blisters will also appear on the palms, fingers, soles of the feet and sometimes on the buttocks. These blisters do not itch and usually last for seven to 10 days.

Other symptoms can include headache, vomiting, diarrhea, sore throat, loss of appetite and feeling tired. Sometimes, people can have the disease without any symptoms at all. Hand, foot and mouth disease is not a serious illness and complications are rare.

How does hand, foot and mouth disease spread?

Hand, foot and mouth disease spreads through:

- **Touching** an infected person's saliva, mucus or fluid from blisters, then touching your own eyes, nose or mouth
- **Breathing** in droplets from an infected person when they cough, sneeze or talk
- **Touching contaminated secretions**, such as an infected child's stool when assisting with toileting or changing diapers
- **Touching contaminated objects or surfaces**, such as toys, tables, taps or door handles, and then touching your face
- Having **close contact** with an infected person by kissing, hugging or sharing cups and eating utensils

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After coming into contact with an infected person, it usually takes three to five days for symptoms to appear. The disease is most contagious during the first week. However, the virus can remain contagious for several weeks, as the virus may be present in the stool for weeks.

Can children attend school, child care centre, school, camp or other group activities?

Since symptoms are typically mild, children can continue attending their activities if:

- They have no fever
- Feel well enough to participate in classes and activities

Routine exclusion from child care and school is not indicated as this is not a reportable disease.

If anything about your child's health concerns you, seek medical advice from your child's physician.

How can hand, foot and mouth disease be prevented?

There is no vaccine to prevent hand, foot and mouth disease. If a child has come into contact with someone who has the disease, you should watch for symptoms. To help prevent catching or spreading hand, foot and mouth disease:

- **Wash your hands** with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after wiping a child's nose, changing a diaper, using the washroom, and before preparing or eating food
- **Help children wash their hands** and keep blisters clean
- **Avoid touching your face** with unwashed hands, especially your eyes, nose and mouth
- **Carefully throw away or clean** items contaminated by an infected child's nose and throat or stool
- **Clean and disinfect** all common toys, objects (including sports equipment) and surfaces. Clean and disinfect diaper change area after each diaper change. Pay close attention to the following areas: high touch surfaces (e.g. door handles, light switches), washrooms (e.g. toilet seats, faucet taps), areas contaminated with bodily fluids (e.g. vomit, feces), sleeping areas (e.g. mattress covers, furniture), and garbage collection areas.
- **Avoid sharing items** such as cups, glasses and utensils with an infected person
- **Avoid close contact** with an infected person, such as hugging or kissing them

How is hand, foot and mouth disease treated?

There is no specific treatment for this disease. Symptoms may be relieved with the use of medication. If anything about your child's health concerns you, seek medical advice from your child's physician.