

# HAND, FOOT, AND MOUTH DISEASE

## **What is hand, foot and mouth disease?**

Hand, foot and mouth disease (HFMD) is a common illness of infants and children. A group of viruses called enteroviruses causes the illness. HFMD is often confused with foot-and-mouth disease of cattle, sheep and swine. Although the names sound alike, the two diseases are not related at all and are caused by different viruses.

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

Symptoms usually begin 3 to 6 days after exposure to the virus. Symptoms may include fever, a sore throat, sores in the mouth, and a rash with blisters. The skin rash appears as flat or raised red spots, some with blisters. The rash does not itch, and it is usually seen on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet.

## **How is hand, foot and mouth disease spread?**

It is spread from person to person by direct contact with nose and throat secretions, saliva, fluid from blisters, or the stool of infected persons. Another way to get HFMD is by touching articles that are freshly soiled by the infected person's sores or blisters.

## **How long are people contagious?**

HFMD is moderately contagious. A person is most contagious during the first week of the illness. A person may shed the virus for weeks; even if s/he is no longer ill.

## **Who gets hand, foot and mouth disease?**

HFMD occurs mainly in children under 10 years old but may also occur in adults. Everyone is at risk of infection, but not everyone who is infected becomes ill. A person can become ill more than once with HFMD because there are different viruses that cause this illness.

## **What treatment is available for people with hand, foot and mouth disease?**

No specific treatment is available for this type of virus. Treatment is given to provide relief from fever, aches, or pain from the mouth ulcers.

## **Do infected people need to be kept home from school, work or daycare?**

Generally, persons with HFMD do not need to be kept home. Ill persons should pay special attention to properly washing their hands.

## **How can I protect myself and my family from getting hand, foot, and mouth disease?**

- Wash hands frequently with water and soap. (Sanitizing gel may be substituted when hands are not visibly soiled.)
- Clean "dirty" or contaminated surfaces and soiled items first with soap and water, and then disinfect them with a dilute solution of chlorine-containing bleach (made by mixing approximately ¼ cup of bleach with one gallon of water).
- Avoid close contact (e.g. kissing, hugging, sharing utensils) with children with HFMD.