



HAND, FOOT, AND MOUTH DISEASE (Coxsackie Virus A)

What is hand, foot, and mouth disease?

Hand, foot, and mouth disease (HFMD) is a highly contagious childhood illness caused by a group of enteroviruses. While Coxsackievirus A16 is the virus most known for causing HFMD, other viruses have been associated with it. HFMD is most common in children under the age of 5 but can be seen in older children and adults.

Is HFMD the same as foot-and-mouth disease?

No. HFMD is a different disease than foot-and-mouth disease which is seen in cattle, sheep, pigs, goats, and deer.

What are the symptoms of HFMD and when do they start?

In most people, HFMD causes mild symptoms or no symptoms at all. Mild symptoms appear three to five days after exposure and include fever, sore throat, cough, decreased appetite, and a general feeling of being unwell. In others, infection may result in painful blisters in the mouth, on the gums and tongue, on the palms and fingers of the hand, or on the soles of the feet, one to two days after initial symptoms develop. The fluid in these blisters contains the virus. Symptoms may last for seven to 10 days.

Is HFMD serious?

The illness is typically mild and complications are rare. The infection usually goes away without any serious complications after seven to 10 days. In rare cases, HFMD can cause more serious complications such as viral meningitis, swelling on the brain, or temporary loss of fingernails or toenails.

How is HFMD treated?

There is no specific treatment available for HFMD. It resolves on its own after seven to 10 days. Individuals can relieve symptoms using over-the-counter medicines for fever and pain. It is important to take steps to avoid dehydration, as mouth sores may make it painful to swallow.

How is HFMD spread?

Infection spreads from person to person by direct contact with nose and throat discharges (such saliva or nasal mucus), fluid from blisters/scabs, or contact with feces (stools) of infected persons. It can also spread through contact with contaminated objects. Infected persons are most contagious during their first week of illness. People can sometimes spread the virus to others for days or weeks after symptoms go away or if they have no symptoms at all. HFMD is not transmitted to or from pets or other animals.



How is HFMD diagnosed?

The diagnosis is generally suspected on the appearance of the blister-like rash in a child with a mild febrile illness. Although specific laboratory tests are available to confirm the diagnosis, they are rarely performed due to expense and length of time needed to complete the tests.

How can HFMD be prevented?

- Adults and children should wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after:
 - diaper changes
 - using the toilet
 - blowing their nose, coughing, or sneezing
 - before and after caring for someone who is sick.
- Disinfect contaminated surfaces, frequently touched surfaces, and soiled linens.
- Avoid touching the eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Individuals are often excluded from childcare programs, schools, or other group settings during the first few days of the illness. These measures may reduce the spread of infection, but they will not completely interrupt it, because some persons shedding the virus may not show symptoms.

Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's homepage on hand, foot, and mouth disease: <https://www.cdc.gov/hand-foot-mouth/index.html>

Delaware's "Managing Infectious Disease in Childcare Settings" manual: <https://www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/epi/files/ChildCareManual2021.pdf>