

Hand, Food, and Mouth Disease

What is hand, foot, and mouth disease?

Hand, foot, and mouth disease (HFMD) is a viral infection most often caused by a virus from the enterovirus group called coxsackie virus. It causes a fever and blister-like rash that occurs on the hands, feet, and in the mouth. Symptoms can also include poor appetite, runny nose, and sore throat. The rash usually develops one or two days after these symptoms start. Some people have no symptoms but are still infected.

Who gets HFMD?

Anyone can get HFMD, but it usually occurs in infants and young children under 5.

How is the virus that causes HFMD spread?

The virus is spread from person to person by direct contact with body fluids from an infected person. Body fluids that can spread the virus are nose and throat fluids, fluid from blisters, and stools of infected people. People are most contagious during the first week of illness.

Is HFMD the same as Foot and Mouth disease?

HFMD is not spread to or from animals and should not be confused with a different disease that affects cattle, sheep, and pigs called "foot and mouth disease".

How soon will someone become ill after getting infected?

The usual time between becoming infected and having symptoms is 3 to 7 days. Fever is usually the first symptom.

How long can an infected person carry the coxsackie virus?

People can sometimes spread the coxsackie virus to others for days or weeks after symptoms go away or if they have no symptoms at all.

How is HFMD diagnosed?

Physicians can diagnose most cases based on symptoms.

What is the treatment for HFMD?

No specific treatment is available for this or other enterovirus infections. Treatment is based on the symptoms to relieve fever, aches, or pain from the mouth sores.

Should an infected person be excluded from school or work?

HFMD is very contagious. You should stay home while you are sick with hand, foot, and mouth disease.

What precautions should pregnant women take?

Complications with HFMD while pregnant are rare but can be very serious. Babies born to mothers who are contagious near the time of delivery can become infected but will usually only have mild illness. Pregnant women should ask their doctor about coxsackie virus infections.

What can be done to stop the spread of hand, foot, and mouth disease?

Good personal hygiene including good hand washing is the best way to prevent infection with the coxsackie virus, especially after contact with a likely source such as after changing a diaper. Contaminated environmental objects should be cleaned with soap and water, followed by disinfection with a bleach solution. One gallon of water plus 1/4 cup of bleach will kill viruses on surfaces, however this solution needs to be mixed daily to be effective. Health care workers should wear disposable gloves when handling sheets or clothes soiled with feces or urine of persons who are ill.