



Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease HFMD

Disease Fact Sheet

What is hand, foot and mouth disease?

HFMD is a viral illness that can occur at any age, but most often in infants and children under 5 years of age. Symptoms are usually mild and resolve on their own in 7 to 10 days. Some people, especially young children, may get dehydrated if they are not able to swallow enough liquids because of the painful mouth sores associated with hand, foot and mouth disease. Most cases of hand, foot and mouth disease occur in summer and fall.

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

HFMD usually starts with a fever, poor appetite, and a sore throat. One to two days after the fever starts, painful sores usually develop in the mouth. They begin as small red spots that blister and that often become ulcers. The sores are often in the back of the mouth. A skin rash also develops, usually on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet, but may also appear on the knees, elbows, buttocks or genital area.

People infected with the viruses that cause hand, foot, and mouth disease may not get all the symptoms of the disease. They may only get mouth sores or skin rash. On rare occasions, people with the virus that causes hand, foot and mouth disease may develop viral meningitis.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms usually appear 3 to 7 days after exposure.

How is hand, foot and mouth disease spread?

The disease is spread by contact with discharges from the nose or throat or the feces of infected people.

When and for how long is a person able to spread the disease?

A person with HFMD can transmit the virus through nose or throat discharges or feces during the acute stage of the illness. The virus can continue to be transmitted in the feces perhaps as long as several weeks after the onset of infection when a person has no apparent illness.

What is the treatment for HFMD?

HFMD is usually self-limiting and does not require treatment. Persons with the disease should rest. They may be given liquids and medication to control fever or pain associated with the disease.

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

People can lower their risk of being infected with HFMD by thoroughly washing their hands with soap and water after using the toilet; changing diapers; or having any contact with nose or throat discharge, stool, or blister fluid from an infected person. Toys and surfaces should first be washed with soap and water, and then cleaned and disinfected. Children with hand, foot and mouth disease should be kept home from day care or school until their fever goes away and their mouth sores have healed.