
Hand, Foot, and Mouth Disease



Hand, foot, and mouth disease is a contagious viral illness that commonly affects infants and children. While there is no vaccine to prevent the disease, there are simple steps you and your family can take to reduce the risk of getting sick.

Hand, foot, and mouth disease (HFMD) is a contagious viral illness that commonly affects infants and children in the U.S. and abroad. In the U.S. and other countries with temperate climates, HFMD occurs most often in summer and early autumn. While there is no vaccine to prevent the disease, there are simple steps you and your family can take to reduce the risk of getting sick.

HFMD

- Usually causes fever, sores in the mouth, and a rash with blisters.
- Is moderately contagious.
- Mostly affects children younger than 10 years of age, but people of any age can be infected.
- Has no specific treatment.
- Infection risk can be reduced by practicing good hygiene, such as washing hands frequently.
- Is **not** the same as foot-and-mouth disease.

What Are the Symptoms of HFMD?

Symptoms usually begin with a fever, poor appetite, malaise (feeling vaguely unwell), and often a sore throat. A couple of days after the fever starts, painful sores can develop in the mouth. A skin rash with flat or raised red spots can also develop, usually on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet and sometimes on the buttocks. This rash may blister, but it will not itch. Some people with HFMD may only have a rash; others may only have mouth sores. Other people with HFMD may show no symptoms at all.

Is HFMD Serious?

HFMD is usually not serious. The illness is typically mild, and nearly all patients recover in 7–10 days without medical treatment.

Is HFMD Contagious?

Yes, HFMD is moderately contagious. The disease is spread by direct contact with nose and throat discharges, saliva, fluid from blisters, or the stool of infected persons.

People with HFMD are most contagious during the first week of their illness, but they can spread the virus that causes HFMD weeks after symptoms have gone away. It is also important to remember that people who get HFMD and show no symptoms of the disease can still spread the viruses that cause it.

Who Is at Risk for HFMD?

HFMD mostly infects children younger than 10 years of age, but older children and adults can also get the disease.

Can HFMD Be Treated?

There is no specific treatment for HFMD. Fever and pain can be managed with over-the-counter fever reducers/pain relievers, such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen. In addition, individuals with HFMD should drink enough fluids to prevent dehydration (loss of body fluids).

Can HFMD Be Prevented?

There is no vaccine to protect against HFMD. However, the risk of getting the disease can be reduced by

- Frequently washing hands, especially after diaper changes;
- Thoroughly cleaning objects and surfaces (toys, doorknobs, etc.) that may be contaminated with a virus that causes HFMD; and
- Avoiding close contact (like kissing and hugging) with people who are infected.

Does My Child Need to Stay Home If They Have a Rash?

Because people with HFMD can be contagious for up to 6 days before the rash shows, your child does not need to stay home unless they have symptoms that do not allow the child to participate and staff determine that they can't care for your child within the daycare setting. Fever and/or excessive drooling from mouth sores are an example of symptoms that might be a problem that staff will find difficult to manage within the daycare setting. You may be asked to keep your child at home until these symptoms resolve.

When Should I Seek Medical Care for My Child?

Usually the illness will resolve without medical care. However, if your child is very uncomfortable with signs of illness from the infection, such as an inability to eat or drink, or if your child seems very ill, you should contact your health care provider. It is very important that your child stays hydrated-contact your health care provider right away if you notice that your child isn't able to take fluids or if your child becomes listless or lethargic.