

Hand Foot and Mouth Disease

Description:

Hand, foot and mouth disease is caused by a number of different viruses (coxsackie virus and less commonly enterovirus 71). It is not a serious illness and has nothing to do with animal diseases with similar names (ie. foot and mouth disease in livestock, or paw and mouth disease in cats). It is a relatively common illness in children and outbreaks often occur among groups of children, especially in child care centres.

Symptoms:

The symptoms of this disease include blisters inside the cheeks, gums and on the sides of the tongue, as well as on their hands and feet. Although it is not common, blisters may be seen in the nappy area. Children with hand, foot and mouth disease may have a low fever, be listless and may not eat well for a day or two.

The blisters usually persist for seven to 10 days.

Transmission

People can spread the virus while there is fluid in the blisters and faeces can remain infectious for several weeks.

Treatment:

Usually no treatment is required.

Prevention:

There is no vaccination for prevention against hand foot and mouth disease. The best form of protection is good hygiene:

- wash hands with soap and water for at least 15 seconds and dry thoroughly before handling food, after going to the toilet and changing nappies.
- implement good cleaning procedures
- allow blisters to dry naturally and do not deliberately pierce blisters because the fluid within the blisters is infectious.

Control

Children with hand, foot and mouth disease should be excluded from child care or school until all blisters have dried.

Help and Assistance

For further information, please contact your local doctor, community health centre or nearest public health unit.

Related Content

[Enterovirus 71 fact sheet](#)

Footnotes

Heymann, D., ed. 2004. *Control of Communicable Diseases Manual*, 18th edition. Washington, DC: American Public Health Association.