

Health Facts

Emergency Department

Hand, foot and mouth disease

What causes hand, foot and mouth disease (HFMD)

HFMD is a viral infection caused by a group of enteroviruses and is most commonly caused by the coxsackie virus. It is mainly seen in children under the age of ten. It rarely causes further complications. HFMD is not linked to the foot and mouth disease which affects animals.

Signs and Symptoms

- Fever
- Sore throat
- Small blisters on the inside of the mouth, the sides of the tongue, palms of the hands, fingers, soles of feet and nappy area; the blisters should not be itchy
- Poor appetite
- Lethargy

Symptoms usually start three to seven days after catching the infection. Symptoms can last between seven to ten days and admission to hospital is rarely needed.

How does it spread

It is easily spread from one person to another by coughing and sneezing as well as by coming in contact with fluid from inside the blisters. It can also be in faeces (poo) for up to several weeks after being infected.

Washing your hands after touching bodily fluids such as fluids from the nose, mouth and chest as well as from inside the blisters, is the best way of preventing HFMD from spreading. Do not share items such as cutlery, drinking cups, toothbrushes or towels.

Treatment

There is no treatment as it is a virus and antibiotics will not work. Complications of HFMD (viral meningitis, encephalitis and a poliomyelitis like paralysis) are all extremely rare.

Care at home

- Eating and drinking can be painful because of the mouth blisters
- Ask your doctor or pharmacist about what medicines are good to use to provide pain relief for the mouth blisters.
- Give your child frequent sips of fluid as this will help stop them from becoming dehydrated.
- Do not pop the blisters – leave them to dry naturally.

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How long is a child infectious

Your child should stay home from school, playgroup, kindergarten and child care until the fluid in the blisters has dried.

When to seek medical attention

- If your child has symptoms of a headache or stiff neck
- If your child's condition is not improving

If you have any other concerns take your child to the GP or Emergency Department.

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