

HAND, FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE

What is hand, foot and mouth disease (HFMD)?

HFMD is usually a mild illness that is caused by a virus. It is more common among infants and children but can also occur in adults. Symptoms can include fever, skin rash, and red spots or sores in the mouth. It is most common in the summer and fall.

Who is at risk of getting HFMD?

HFMD is common in infants and children under age 10, but can also affect older children, teenagers and adults. A person can be infected if they are exposed to a type of virus that they've never been exposed to before. However, some people who are infected do not get sick.

What are the symptoms of HFMD?

The first symptoms of HFMD are usually fever, sore throat, poor appetite, and feeling sick or tired. One to two days after fever begins, small red spots appear in the mouth on the inside of the cheek, gums, and tongue. The spots may turn into blisters or ulcers. A skin rash can also appear on the hands, feet, and buttocks, and sometimes on the arms and legs. Not everyone with HFMD will have all of these symptoms.

HFMD symptoms are usually mild and may last for 7 to 10 days. However, in rare occasions, HFMD can cause complications. One complication is viral meningitis. Symptoms of viral meningitis include headache, stiff neck, and fever. People with viral meningitis sometimes may need to be hospitalized. Very rarely, HFMD can also cause encephalitis (swelling of the brain). Encephalitis is a severe disease that can cause death.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms of HFMD usually appear 3–7 days after being in contact with the virus.

How is HFMD diagnosed?

Doctors usually diagnose HFMD based on the patient's age, symptoms, and type and location of rash or sores. Generally, a doctor does not need a test to diagnose HFMD. Sometimes, the doctor may take a throat swab or collect a sample of blister fluid or stool to test what kind of virus is causing the illness.

How is HFMD treated?

There is no specific treatment for the illness. People with HFMD should rest and drink plenty of liquid to prevent dehydration. A doctor may also recommend medications to reduce fever and pain.

Sores in the mouth can make swallowing painful and difficult, and some children may refuse to drink fluids for this reason. If this causes serious dehydration, treatment with intravenous fluids may be needed.

How is HFMD spread?

The virus that causes HFMD can be found in the infected person's saliva, stool, blister fluid, and nose and throat discharges. It can be easily spread by coughing and sneezing and putting contaminated objects, like toys or hands, in the mouth. The virus can stay in the stool for several weeks or months after the person is no longer ill. The viruses that cause HFMD can also survive for a long time on environmental surfaces such as tables or toys.

A person with HFMD is most contagious during the first week of illness, but may continue to be contagious for several weeks after their symptoms are gone since the virus stays in the person's stool for several weeks.

How can HFMD be prevented?

Everyone in the household of a person with HFMD should thoroughly wash their hands with soap and water after using the toilet, changing diapers, or having any contact with nose and throat discharge, stool, or blister fluid. Sick persons should not share eating or drinking utensils and should cover their mouths and noses when coughing or sneezing. Toys and surfaces should first be washed with soap and water, and then cleaned with a dilute solution of bleach (add $\frac{1}{4}$ cup bleach to one gallon of water).

Children with HFMD should be kept home from daycare or school until their fever goes away and their mouth sores have healed. Adults with illness should stay home from work until symptoms are gone.