



HEALTH INFORMATION

Hand Foot and Mouth

What is Hand Foot and Mouth?

Hand, foot and mouth disease is a viral infection that can affect young children. It doesn't usually pose a serious threat to a child's health, but it can be an unpleasant. The virus is quite different from foot and mouth disease of animals. Adults catch this virus although symptoms are usually milder.

What causes it?

Hand, foot and mouth disease is caused by a group of viruses known as enteroviruses. The two most common types of viruses that can cause the condition are the:

- Coxsackievirus A16
- Enterovirus 71

Enterovirus 71 carries a higher risk of causing serious complications. It is thought that the virus first spreads to tissue inside the mouth near to the tonsils and also down to the digestive system. The virus can then spread into nearby lymph nodes (glands) and then throughout the body via the blood. The immune system (the body's defence against infection) controls the virus before the virus can spread into vital organs such as the brain.

The virus is spread by direct contact with nasal and throat secretions or faeces of the infected person. The virus can also be transmitted by aerosol spread, i.e. coughing and sneezing. Coughing and sneezing are also likely to contaminate hands which, if not washed thoroughly, may transmit infection..

What are the symptoms and signs?

Symptoms of hand, foot and mouth disease usually develop 3-5 days after initial exposure to the infection. Early symptoms include:

- A high temperature
- Loss of appetite
- Cough
- Abdominal pain
- Sore throat

Occasionally, hand, foot and mouth disease can cause vomiting.

Mouth ulcers

After 24- 48 hours, red spots can develop inside the mouth, particularly around the tongue, gums and inside of the cheeks. The spots can rapidly develop into larger yellow-grey mouth ulcers surrounded by a red ring of tissue. The ulcers can be very painful and can make eating, drinking and swallowing difficult, which may cause a young child to dribble excessively. The ulcers should pass within 5-7 days.

Skin rash

Soon after the mouth ulcers appear small red spots may appear. The most common places for the spots to develop are on the side of the fingers, the back of the hands and the side of the heels. Less commonly the palms of the hands and the soles of the feet can also be affected as can the buttocks and groin areas. The spots are around 2-5 mm in size with a darkish-grey centre with a 'rugby-ball' type of shape. The spots are usually painless and non-itchy, although occasionally can develop into blisters which can become painful.

What is the treatment?

No specific treatment or immunisation is given for this disease.

What can you do for self help?

Make the infected person feel as comfortable as possible including:

- using paracetamol, ibuprofen and mouth gels to relieve the pain of mouth ulcers
- drinking plenty of fluids to help relieve a high temperature

For further information go to:

www.nhs.uk/conditions/handfootandmouthdisease
www.hpa.org.uk