

# Hand-Foot-Mouth



## Disease

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### **What is hand-foot-mouth disease (HFMD)?**

Hand-foot-mouth disease (HFMD) is a common, mild childhood viral illness. The disease causes fever and blister-like eruptions in the mouth and/or a skin rash. It is commonly caused by a coxsackievirus, which is part of a larger group of viruses called enteroviruses. HFMD is more common in the summer and early autumn, but can occur any time of the year.

### **Who gets HFMD?**

HFMD typically affects children under the age of ten. Adults may also become infected with the virus. HFMD is most common in children in child care settings because of frequent diaper changes and potty training, and because little children often put their hands in their mouths.

### **What are the symptoms of HFMD?**

Initial symptoms of HFMD include fever, poor appetite, general discomfort, and often a sore throat. Approximately two days after onset of initial symptoms, painful sores develop in the mouth. They begin as small, red spots that often become ulcers. A non-itchy rash with flat or raised red blister-like spots develops one to two days after initial symptoms appear. The rash typically appears on the hands and feet and can also appear on the buttocks. Most patients recover without complications within seven to ten days.

Some people, particularly adults, can pass the virus without showing any signs or symptoms of the disease.

### **How soon after an infection do the symptoms appear?**

The incubation period for HFMD is three to seven days, with fever being the first symptom to appear.

### **How is HFMD spread?**

HFMD is moderately contagious and is spread from person to person by direct contact with nose and throat secretions, saliva, fluid from blisters, or stool of the infected person. Surfaces contaminated with these substances may also become a source of infection.

### **When and for how long is a person able to spread HFMD?**

People infected with the virus are contagious from onset of symptoms until the blister-like rash disappears. People are most infectious during the first week of their illness though

the virus will continue to be shed in the stool for several weeks after the rash has healed.

### **Does the infection of HFMD make a person immune?**

Infection results in immunity to the specific virus that caused HFMD. A second case of HFMD may occur following infection with a different type of enterovirus.

### **What are the complications associated with HFMD?**

Complications from the virus infections that cause HFMD are not common, but if they do occur, medical care should be sought. Complications can include viral or aseptic meningitis, encephaliti (swelling of the brain) or a polio-like paralysis.

### **What treatment is available for HFMD?**

There is no specific treatment for HFMD. Over-the-counter medication can be provided for pain relief for mouth sores. Signs and symptoms of HFMD usually clear up in 7 to 10 days.

### **Are there vaccines for HFMD?**

There is no vaccine available for hand-foot-mouth disease.

### **What can be done to prevent the spread of HFMD?**

Practicing good hand washing techniques to reduce the spread of HFMD is important.

Excluding children from school and child care during the first few days of the infection will reduce the spread of the virus, but will not completely stop the disease from spreading. Children and adults should use proper hand hygiene, especially after using the toilet and changing diapers. In home and child care settings, thorough cleaning of contaminated surfaces and items with a dilute bleach solution is an effective way to reduce the spread of viruses.

### **For more information:**

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