



Hand, Foot, Mouth Disease (HFMD)

What is hand, foot and mouth disease?

Hand, foot, and mouth disease (HFMD) is an illness caused by a group of viruses called enteroviruses. This disease is most common in children under 5 years of age; however it can sometimes occur in adults.

What are the symptoms of HFMD?

It usually takes 3-6 days for a person to have symptoms after being infected. Signs and symptoms of HFMD may include:

- Fever
- Poor appetite
- Sore throat
- Headache
- Small painful blisters inside the mouth on tongue, inside of the cheeks, and gums (last 4 to 6 days)
- Rash or blisters on the palms of hands, on fingers, and on the soles of the feet for 7 to 10 days.
- Blisters may also appear on the knees, elbows, buttocks or genital area

Some people may not get all the symptoms of the disease and may only get the mouth sore or skin rash. Children may become dehydrated if they are not able to swallow liquids because of the painful mouth sores.

How do people catch HFMD?

HFMD is found in the stool, nose (mucus) and throat (spit, sputum) of an infected person. You can catch it by directly or indirectly:

- Breathing in air contaminated with the virus after an infected person close to you has sneezed or coughed
- Touching the stool of an infected person (ex. changing a diaper)
- Touching the nose (mucus) and throat (spit, sputum) of an infected person and touching your own eyes, nose or mouth
- Touching objects like toys and door handles contaminated by the virus

Infected people are most contagious during the first week of the illness, but the virus can remain in the body for weeks after a person's symptoms are gone. This means that infected people can still pass the infection to others even though they may appear well.

How is HFMD diagnosed?

A health care provider can diagnose HFMD by looking at the blisters on the body and the mouth sores in a person with a fever. Although there are laboratory tests available, they are rarely used.

How is HFMD treated?

There is no treatment for HFMD however taking over the counter medications can relieve some of the symptoms. (Aspirin should not be given to children).

- Staying hydrated is important, give your child cool fluids
- Avoid spicy or acidic foods and drinks since they may make sores in the mouth more painful

How can I prevent HFMD?

There is no vaccine for HFMD; however you can lower your risk of being infected by:

- Washing your hands with soap and water, especially after using the bathroom
- Careful disposal of diapers and any soiled articles
- Wear gloves when applying lotions or treatment to blisters/sores
- Clean and disinfect all common toys and diaper changing areas (first wash with soap and water then disinfect with one solution of chlorine bleach made by mixing 1 tablespoon of bleach with 4 cups of water)
- Avoid close contact (kissing, hugging, sharing cups) with infected persons

Should sick children or staff be excluded from school or daycare?

Children who have a fever should stay home for 24 hours after the fever has gone away without fever reducing medicine. Children who do not feel well enough to participate in activities should also stay home. Adults who have a fever or who do not feel well enough to provide care should also remain at home.



Boston Public Health Commission | Infectious Disease Bureau

1010 Massachusetts Avenue | Boston, MA 02118 | www.bphc.org | 617-534-5611