



Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease Fact Sheet (HFMD)

What is HFMD?

HFMD is an infection most commonly caused by Coxsackie virus. It usually occurs during the time school is in session.

Who gets HFMD?

Anyone can get HFMD. It most commonly seen in infants and children younger than 5 years old.

How is the virus spread?

The virus is spread by the secretions in the throat, blister fluid or in the stool. Covering the mouth with disposable tissues when sneezing or coughing and washing hands after handling soiled tissues (including diapers) is the best way to stop the spread of the bacteria. Avoid close contact such as kissing, hugging, or sharing eating utensils or cups with people with hand, foot, and mouth disease.

What are the symptoms of HFMD?

The major symptom is small sores or lesions in the mouth, on the hands, and on the feet. The lesions can look like the beginning of chickenpox. A low grade fever can also occur. Many adults do not develop symptoms after they are infected.

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How soon after infection do symptoms appear?

The symptoms usually start 2 to 5 days after infection.

How long can an infected person carry the Coxsackie virus?

The Coxsackie virus may be found in the throat of an infected person for 2 weeks (even if there are no lesions in the mouth) and in the stool for 1 month after infection. Infected persons who do not appear to be ill may also spread the virus.

How is hand, foot and mouth disease diagnosed?

Most cases are diagnosed by clinical symptoms only. On occasion, samples from the throat or feces may be sent to a laboratory for analysis

What is the treatment for Coxsackie infections?

There is usually no treatment for hand, foot and mouth disease. Over the counter medications (i.e. fever reducers), mouthwash and/or throat sprays may be used to relieve symptoms.

Should an infected person be excluded from school or work?

No.

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What precautions should pregnant women take?

Although there's normally no risk to the pregnancy or baby, it's best to avoid close contact with anyone who has HFMD. Pregnant women should carefully wash their hands after handling wet diapers or having contact with urine or saliva. Pregnant women working in childcare centers should not kiss babies or young children on the mouth. Pregnant women should ask their doctor about Coxsackie virus infections.

What can be done to stop the spread of hand, foot and mouth disease?

Good handwashing is the best way to prevent infection with the HFMD. Healthcare workers should wear disposable gloves when handling sheets or clothes soiled with the feces or urine of persons who are ill.

*For further information, contact the
Oklahoma City-County Health
Department (405) 425-4437*

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