

What is hand, foot, and mouth disease?

Hand, foot, and mouth disease (HFMD) is a common illness of infants and children. It is characterized by fever, sores in the mouth, and a rash with blisters. HFMD begins with a mild fever, poor appetite, malaise ("feeling sick"), and frequently a sore throat.

One or two days after the fever begins, painful sores develop in the mouth. They begin as small red spots that blister and then often become ulcers. They are usually located on the tongue, gums, and inside of the cheeks. The skin rash develops over 1 to 2 days with flat or raised red spots, some with blisters.

The rash does not itch, and it is usually located on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet. It may also appear on the buttocks. A person with HFMD may have only the rash or the mouth ulcers.

Is HFMD contagious?

Yes, HFMD is moderately contagious. Infection is spread from person to person by direct contact with nose and throat discharges, saliva, fluid from blisters, or the stool of infected persons. A person is most contagious during the first week of the illness.

How soon will someone become ill after getting infected?

The usual period from infection to onset of symptoms ("incubation period") is 3 to 7 days. Fever is often the first symptom of HFMD.

Who is at risk for HFMD?

HFMD occurs mainly in children under 10 years old, but may also occur in adults too. Everyone is at risk of infection, but not everyone who is infected becomes ill. Infants, children, and adolescents are more likely to be susceptible to infection and illness from these viruses, because they are less likely than adults to have antibodies and be immune from previous exposures to them. Infection results in immunity to the specific virus, but a second episode may occur following infection with a different member of the enterovirus group.

How is HFMD treated?

No specific treatment is available for this or other enterovirus infections. Symptomatic treatment is given to provide relief from fever, aches, or pain from the mouth ulcers.

Can HFMD be prevented?

Specific prevention for HFMD or other non-polio enterovirus infections is not available, but the risk of infection can be lowered by good hygienic practices. Preventive measures include frequent handwashing, especially after diaper changes, cleaning of contaminated surfaces and soiled items first with soap and water, and then disinfecting them with [Microbicide™](#) Silver Ion Complex. Avoidance of close contact (kissing, hugging, sharing utensils, etc.) with children with HFMD may also help to reduce the risk of infection to caregivers.

