

Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease

Patient Information Leaflet

What is it?

Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease is an infection caused by a virus. It is a relatively common condition, occurring mainly in children under 10 years of age (usually the 0 to 4 age group). It is more common during the summer and early autumn. It often occurs in 3 to 4 year cycles. Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease must not be confused with foot and mouth disease of cattle, which is completely different.

What are the symptoms?

The incubation period, the time between catching the virus and symptoms developing is between 3 and 5 days. Not all people who catch the virus will develop symptoms.

The symptoms may appear quite suddenly and include:

- fever
- sore throat
- blisters and sores about 4 days after fever on the:
 - inside of the cheeks
 - gums and tongue
 - palms and fingers
 - soles of the feet
 - genitalia (external sexual organs)

The symptoms may continue for 7 to 10 days

Sometimes other symptoms may be present: -

- abdominal or stomach pain
- diarrhoea
- headache
- cough

How does it spread?

Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease is spread by droplets from the nose and throat, for example, during sneezing, coughing, kissing, etc. The bowel motions (faeces) of infected people are also infectious.

It is highly unlikely that the disease is spread by insects, water, food, or sewage.

What precautions do I have to take?

Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease is infectious during the acute stage of the illness (at the beginning). Outbreaks can occur in nurseries, playgroups, schools etc., where children have close contact with each other.

As the virus causing Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease is present in the bowel motions for several weeks, care should be taken when changing nappies, visiting the toilet, etc. In order to help prevent the spread of this disease, the following precautions should be taken.

Thorough handwashing, paying particular attention to between fingers and under the nails. Wash hands:

after

- changing nappies/potting
- using or cleaning the toilet
- helping young children with toileting
- contact with respiratory secretions
e.g. nose blowing

and before

- handling food
- cooking
- eating
- feeding youngsters or elderly people

Pregnancy

Pregnant woman who develop symptoms of Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease or who have had close contact with a case can be reassured that there is **no** known risk to the baby.

Can my child go to school/nursery?

Your child needs to have been well before returning to school or nursery.

Will treatment be necessary?

No treatment is usually required.

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