



Indiana State Department of Health

Epidemiology Resource Center

Quick Facts

About...Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease (HFMD)

What is HFMD?

HFMD is a mild illness caused by viruses known as enteroviruses, most commonly enterovirus 71 and coxsackie viruses. HFMD mainly affects infants and children and causes characteristic sores or blisters on the mouth, hands, and feet. HFMD is not the same as foot and mouth disease (also known as hoof and mouth disease), which is a viral disease found in farm animals. Cases of HFMD are most common in summer and fall, but HFMD may occur year-round. Since HFMD is not reportable in Indiana, the number of cases that occur each year is unknown.

What are the symptoms of HFMD?

The signs and symptoms of HFMD may include:

- Painful sores in the mouth
- Flat red spots or blisters on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet and sometimes on the knees, elbows, buttocks, or genital area
- Fever
- Sore throat
- Loss of appetite
- Feeling unwell (malaise)

People with HFMD may not experience all of these symptoms. Some people who are infected may have no symptoms but may still be able to spread the virus.

How is HFMD spread?

HFMD is spread by contact with the saliva, nose and throat droplets, blister fluid, or stool of an infected person. People with HFMD are most contagious during the first week of the illness, but they can be contagious for days or weeks even after symptoms resolve. Some people who are infected with the virus do not show signs or symptoms of the disease, but they may still be able to spread the virus.

People with HFMD should stay home while sick. Children who have blisters on their mouths and are drooling or those with weeping blisters on their hands should not attend childcare or school. Excluding ill children from childcare or school, however, may not prevent additional cases because the virus can be spread even after symptoms have disappeared. Talk with your healthcare provider if you are unsure when you or your child should return to work, daycare, or school.

Who is at risk for HFMD?

HFMD typically affects young children, as they are less likely to have been exposed to the disease in the past. However, cases can also occur in adults.

How do I know if I have HFMD?

Your healthcare provider can diagnose HFMD. Talk to your healthcare provider if you or your child develops symptoms of HFMD.

How is HFMD treated?

There is no specific treatment for HFMD, but your healthcare provider may prescribe medications that make you feel more comfortable. Since antibiotics work only against bacteria, they are not given to fight the viruses that cause HFMD. Citrus, salty, acidic, or spicy foods should be avoided, since they may cause discomfort in areas of the mouth with sores. Eating soft foods that do not need much chewing, eating or drinking cold foods or drinks, and rinsing the mouth with warm water after meals may help reduce pain from the mouth sores. Drinking plenty of clear fluids is also important to prevent dehydration.

How is HFMD prevented?

Good personal hygiene is the best way to prevent HFMD, including good hand washing, covering coughs or sneezes, and prompt disposal of used facial tissues. Avoid close personal contact (such as hugging or kissing) with infected persons. Routine disinfection of frequently touched surfaces, particularly in childcare or school settings, may reduce possible sources of infection.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
<http://www.cdc.gov/hand-foot-mouth/index.html>

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