

# Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease

Hand, foot and mouth disease is generally a mild illness of childhood passed from person to person. Good hygiene helps prevent infection.

## What is hand, foot and mouth disease?

Hand, foot and mouth disease is generally a mild illness and has nothing to do with the animal disease called foot and mouth disease. It mainly occurs in children under 10 years of age but it can also occur in older children and adults.

## Signs and symptoms

When symptoms do occur, they include blisters that start as small red dots which later become ulcers. Blisters appear on the inside of the cheeks, gums, the sides of the tongue, hands and feet.

In infants, sometimes blisters can be seen in the nappy area. Blisters usually last for 7-10 days. Children can sometimes have a low fever, sore throat, tiredness, feel off colour and may not eat for a day or 2. Very rarely, it can cause other illnesses that affect the heart, brain, or lining of the brain (meningitis), lungs, or eyes.

## How is it spread?

It is usually spread by person-to-person contact. It is also spread by secretions from the mouth or respiratory system, and by direct contact with the fluid in blisters.

It usually takes between 3-5 days after contact with an infected person before blisters appear. As long as there is fluid in the blisters, they remain infectious. The virus can remain in faeces for several weeks.

Children with the disease should be excluded from school or childcare facilities until their blisters have dried. The illness should be reported to the director of the childcare centre or school principal.

## What is the risk of transmission?

Hand, foot and mouth disease is common and outbreaks may occur among groups of children, such as in child care centres.

## What treatment is available?

Usually no treatment is needed. Paracetamol will relieve fever and discomfort. Do not give children aspirin. If the headache is severe, or if fever persists, consult your GP.

## How can you prevent the disease?

Good hygiene is the best protection:

- Wash hands with soap and water after going to the toilet, before eating, after wiping noses, and after changing nappies or soiled clothing
- Avoid sharing cups, eating utensils, items of personal hygiene (e.g. towels, washers and tooth brushes) and clothing (e.g. shoes and socks)
- Thoroughly wash any soiled clothing

Ensure mouths and noses are covered when coughing and sneezing. Wipe the nose and mouth with tissues, dispose of used tissues and wash your hands.

## What precautions can you take?

- Thoroughly wash any soiled clothing
- Ensure your mouth and nose are covered with a mask when in contact with an infected person
- Wear gloves when in contact with an infected person and when disposing of used tissues
- When gloves are removed wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water.