

Hand Foot and Mouth Disease

What is Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease?

Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease is an infection caused by the human coxsackievirus, or enterovirus family, in which blisters appear on the hands and feet and inside the mouth. It affects all age groups, but commonly children aged less than 10, and is found all over the world.

How is it spread?

Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease is spread by airborne droplets of respiratory secretions (saliva, sputum), when people sneeze or cough, by direct contact with the fluid in blisters and by the faeces of infected people. It only affects humans, and is not related to the similar sounding “foot and mouth” disease in cattle.

Symptoms of Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease

Within 3 to 5 days of exposure to the virus, the person may have the symptoms of fatigue, loss of energy and appetite, a sore throat and mouth and a mild fever. In a baby, this may present as a decreased interest in feeding.

Several days after these initial symptoms a non-itchy rash develops

on the palms, hands, soles of the feet and on the inside of the mouth. Mouth lesions can be widespread and occur on the inside surfaces of the cheeks and gums and sides of the tongue.

How serious is Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease?

For most people with the infection, the rash disappears and they feel better within about a week. Very rarely, the illness can be more serious, so if the person complains of severe headache, or their fever persists and they are not getting better, it is advisable to contact your doctor immediately. Fatal cases have been reported.

Treatment

There is no specific treatment and antibiotics are not helpful.

For most people, symptomatic relief with fluids, paracetamol and rest is all that is required.

How can Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease be controlled?

There is no vaccine for Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease. On recovery from the illness, a person will develop immunity against the one specific type of virus that caused the infection. However, as



there are several viruses which can cause Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease, further episodes of the disease are possible from a different virus.

Promoting good hygiene is the best way to stop the spread of the virus. Therefore, practise frequent hand washing, especially when changing nappies and other stool-soiled material. Wash toys contaminated with saliva, and cover the mouth when sneezing and coughing.

People with Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease are infectious during the acute stage of the illness and perhaps longer, since these viruses persist in stools for several weeks after recovery.

The blisters should be allowed to dry naturally, and should not be pierced as the fluid inside them is infectious.

Children with Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease should be excluded from school, preschool and childcare until all blisters have dried.

For more information contact your nearest CDC

CDC Darwin	89228044
CDC Katherine	89739049
CDC Nhulunbuy	89870359
CDC Tennant Creek	89624259
CDC Alice Springs	89517549

Further fact sheets and treatment protocols are available at:
<http://www.nt.gov.au/health/cdc/cdc.shtml>