



Hand, Foot & Mouth Disease

(Vesicular stomatitis with exanthem)

What is it?

Hand, foot and mouth disease is not related to the virus that infects animals. It is common, but not a serious illness in infants and children.

What causes it?

It is caused by coxsackievirus Z16, and occasionally Enterovirus 71.

Symptoms:

The symptoms include: sores in the mouth, fever, a rash with blisters, poor appetite, and occasionally a sore throat. An infected person may also have blister-like sores on the hands (palms and fingers) and soles of the feet. Occasionally there may be sores on the buttocks. There may also be a skin rash that lasts for 7 to 10 days.

What is the incubation period?

It usually takes 3 to 5 days for a person to feel sick once they catch the virus. Fever is usually the first symptom to appear.

What treatment is available?

Treating symptoms of fever, aches, and pain from mouth blisters is usually all that is needed.

Is it contagious?

It is moderately contagious. The virus stays in the large intestine for several weeks, and is passed in the stool (feces). It is also spread from person to person through secretions from the nose and throat. The virus can stay in the respiratory tract for up to one week.

How is it spread?

Hand, foot and mouth disease spreads through direct contact with nose and throat discharges, saliva, fluid from blisters, or the stool of infected people. It is most contagious during the first week of illness.

Are there any complications?

People who have a weak immune system can have persistent central nervous system infections lasting for several months.

Other:

The virus can be found in the feces without signs of illness.

Infected children may return to school or daycare when they feel well enough.

Prevention:

Hand washing and personal hygiene is very important. Hands need to be washed with soap and warm water after using the toilet and before eating or handling food. Cover the nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing. Make sure used tissues are disposed of in the garbage and out of reach of young children.

Sources:

1. Heymann D.L. (Ed.). (2004). *Control of Communicable Diseases Manual*, (18th ed.). Washington, DC: American Public Health Association
2. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention. *What is hand, foot, and mouth disease?* Retrieved Spring 2005, from <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/revb/enterovirus/hfhf.htm>

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