

Fact Sheet

Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease

What is hand, foot and mouth disease?

Hand, foot and mouth disease is a common viral illness that usually affects infants and children younger than 5 years old, but can happen at any age. The most common cause of hand, foot and mouth disease is coxsackievirus A16.

How is hand, foot and mouth disease spread?

Hand, foot and mouth disease is most contagious during the first week of illness. It spreads from person to person through nose and throat secretions (such as saliva, sputum or nasal mucous), blister fluid or the stool of infected persons. Germs can get on a person's hands or other objects and then spread into someone's mouth, causing infection. Hand, foot and mouth disease is not spread from animals.

What are the symptoms of hand, foot and mouth disease?

Symptoms include fever, blister-like sores in the mouth and a skin rash, especially on the palms of the hands, fingers, soles of the feet, buttocks, and sometimes other places on the body.

How do you know you have hand, foot and mouth disease?

Because mouth sores and skin rashes can have many causes, only a health care provider can say for sure if a person has hand, foot and mouth disease. In general, your health care provider will consider:

- Your age.
- Your symptoms.
- How the rash and sores look.

What is the treatment?

There is no specific treatment for hand, foot and mouth disease. With your health care provider's advice, you can give your child over-the-counter medications to reduce fever, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol, others) or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin, others). Do not give aspirin to children or teenagers.

Antibiotics are not effective in treating viral illnesses such as hand, foot and mouth disease.

When can children return to Day Care or School?

Once the diagnosis of hand, foot and mouth disease has been made, a child can return to the child care facility if well enough to take part in activities.

Can hand, foot and mouth disease be prevented?

You can lower your risk of infection by:

- Washing your hands often with soap and water, especially after changing diapers or using the bathroom.
- Disinfecting dirty surfaces and soiled items.
- Avoiding close contact such as kissing or sharing eating utensils or cups with infected people.