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Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease

Introduction

Hand, foot and mouth disease (HFMD) is a viral infection that is most common in young children. The condition does not usually pose a serious threat to health but it can sometimes be an unpleasant condition especially for younger children.

Symptoms of hand foot and mouth disease include:

1. cold-like symptoms such as loss of appetite, cough and a moderately high temperature around 38 – 39C (100.4F – 102.2F)
2. a non-itchy red rash that develops on the hand and the feet; though sometimes the rash can develop into painful blisters
3. painful mouth ulcers

When to see your GP

Hand foot and mouth disease is a self-limiting condition meaning that it will get better by itself without the need for treatment. Symptoms will usually pass away within 7 days.

Contact your GP if your child isn't drinking any fluid or their symptoms last longer than seven days.

Treatment

There is currently no cure for hand, foot and mouth disease so treatment involves making your child feel as comfortable as possible while waiting for the infection to take its course.

Possible treatment options include:

- ◇ Using medicine to control pain and fever and /or mouth gels to relieve ulcer, mouth pain.
- ◇ Drinking plenty of fluids.

What is the cause?

HFMD is caused by a group of viruses known as enteroviruses. The two most common types of viruses that can cause HFMD are called:

Coxsackievirus A16; enterovirus 71

How is the infection spread?

A person with hand foot and mouth disease is highly contagious and remains so for a couple of days after the infection starts. Person with HFMD often eliminates the virus in their stools for longer periods and regular and proper hand washing is a preventive measure (point 3 below).

The infection can be spread by:

1. people coughing or sneezing contaminated droplets which can either be directly inhaled by someone else or
2. contaminate surfaces which can then infect someone if they touch that surface and then touch their mouth or nose
3. people not washing their hands properly after going to the toilet and then contaminating surfaces or food
4. coming into contact with the fluids from an infected person's blisters or saliva





It is normally safe to return to school or work once the symptoms have passed and any blisters have dried over, that means after 5 – 7 days.

Most children will eventually develop immunity against most of the viruses that cause HFMD as they get older.

Complications

It is important to make sure that anyone with hand foot and mouth disease keeps drinking fluids and to avoid becoming dehydrated.

Dehydration can often occur as the mouth ulcers can make drinking fluids painful.

Who is affected?

- ◇ HFMD is a relatively common type of infection.
- ◇ Most cases affect children aged 10 or younger although occasionally adults can also be affected.
- ◇ Symptoms tend to be milder in adults.
- ◇ Both sexes are equally affected by HFMD.

Is it the same as foot and mouth disease?

Hand, foot and mouth disease is *not* the same as foot and mouth disease, which affects cattle, sheep and pigs. The two infections are unrelated

Hand, foot and mouth disease CANNOT be caught from animals.



Sources:

- ◇ <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Hand-foot-and-mouth-disease/Pages/Introduction.aspx>
- ◇ <http://www.cdc.gov/hand-foot-mouth/index.html>

