

## HAND, FOOT, AND MOUTH DISEASE

### What is hand, foot, and mouth (HFMD) disease?

It's a common contagious viral illness that affects mostly infants and children, but adults can get it too. HFMD is most often caused by an enterovirus and is usually a mild illness. Children are most likely to get this infection in the summer and early autumn. There is no vaccine to prevent the disease.

### What are the symptoms of HFMD?

Symptoms usually begin with:

- fever,
- poor appetite,
- malaise (feeling a little unwell), and
- often a sore throat.

A couple of days after the fever starts:

- painful sores can develop in the mouth, and
- a skin rash with flat or raised red spots can also develop, usually on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet and sometimes on the buttocks. This rash may blister, but it will not itch.

### Is it serious?

Not usually. HFMD is typically mild, and nearly all people recover in 7 to 10 days without medical treatment.

### Is HFMD contagious?

Yes, it is moderately contagious. The disease is spread by direct contact with nose and throat discharges, saliva, fluid from blisters, or the stool (feces) of infected persons. People with HFMD are **most contagious during the first week of their illness**, but they can spread the virus for weeks after symptoms have gone away. The virus can live in the stool for several weeks.

### Who is at risk for getting HFMD?

HFMD mostly infects children younger than 10 years, but older children and adults can also get the disease. Once you have HFMD you have immunity to the specific virus that caused the illness but because there are many different strains of HFMD virus you can get it again if you are exposed to one of the other viruses.

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## **Can it be treated?**

There is no specific treatment for HFMD. Fever and pain can be managed with over-the-counter fever reducers/pain relievers such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen. In addition individuals with HFMD should drink enough fluids to prevent dehydration (loss of body fluids).

## **You prevent HFMD through:**

- frequent hand hygiene,
- washing hands with soap and water after changing diapers,
- thoroughly cleaning objects and surfaces (toys, doorknobs, etc.) that may be contaminated with a virus that causes HFMD, and
- avoiding close contact (like kissing and hugging) with people who are infected.

## **Do infected people have to stay home?**

No. Children can continue to attend school or day nursery if they feel well enough to take part in routine activities.

For more information, contact KFL&A Public Health at 613-549-1232 and ask to speak to the communicable disease person on call.