

Hand-foot-mouth disease is a mild, viral illness that affects mainly infants and children less than 10 years of age, most often in the summer and fall months. It's possible that it can affect older children, teenagers, and adults but it is not common. The first symptoms of hand-foot-mouth disease are usually fever, sore throat, loss of appetite, and a feeling of being unwell (malaise). A few days after the fever begins, small red spots develop in the mouth on the inside of the cheek, gums, and tongue which may turn into blisters or ulcers. A red rash, without itching but sometimes with blistering, develops on the palms, soles, and sometimes the buttocks, arms, and legs. Not everyone with hand-foot-mouth develops all of these symptoms. Symptoms are usually mild and resolve on their own in 7-10 days. There is no vaccine to prevention for hand-foot-mouth disease and there is no specific treatment.

Oral ingestion is the main source of hand-foot-mouth disease (HFMD). The illness spreads by person-to-person contact with an infected person's nasal secretions, saliva, fluid from the blisters, stool, or respiratory droplets sprayed into the air after a cough or sneeze. Virus is often passed when an infected person's unwashed hands touch someone else or contaminate a surface. The viruses that cause HFMD can survive for long periods on environmental surfaces.

It is difficult to prevent the infection because symptoms of HFMD usually appear 3-6 days after initial exposure; a person is most contagious during the first week of illness and may continue to be contagious for several weeks after their symptoms are gone.

Thorough handwashing is the best way to prevent the spread of communicable diseases. Everyone should thoroughly wash their hands with soap and water after using the toilet, changing diapers, handling anything soiled with stool, with secretions from the nose or mouth, or with fluid from the blisters, before preparing food, and before eating. It's also important to cover the nose and mouth with a tissue or cough/sneeze into your sleeve. Dispose of used tissues in the trash. PE and gym/athletic uniforms should be taken home frequently and laundered in the hottest temperature of water possible for the materials. And avoid sharing water bottles, or drinking/eating from the same utensils or glasses. Disinfect common areas with soap and water or use Clorox Wipes on a daily basis and when soiled. Toys and pacifiers should be cleaned and sanitized daily as the virus can live on these objects for days.

All of these measures should be implemented by all of us on a daily basis and become habit. We are being exposed daily to many viruses and bacteria that can cause illnesses. The most important way to avoid becoming sick from these is to wash our hands frequently or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. If you are sick, stay home, and please report any illnesses your student may have to school so we may be able to help prevent others from becoming sick.