

IDRS Infectious Disease Reporting System

Disease Reporting 24 Hours a Day

Columbus Public Health and Franklin County Public Health

HAND, FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE

Hand, foot and mouth disease (HFMD) is a common illness of infants and children. It is caused by any of several viruses, the most common being *Coxsackievirus A16*. The coxsackieviruses are members of a group of viruses called the enteroviruses.

Symptoms

- The usual period from infection to onset of symptoms is 3-6 days.
- Fever is often the first symptom of HFMD.
- Poor appetite, general sick feeling
- Sore throat. Within 1-2 days, sores develop in the mouth. They begin as small red spots that blister and then often become ulcers.
- Rash (not itchy) with flat or raised red spots or blisters on the palms and soles of the feet.
- A person with HFMD may have only the rash or the mouth ulcers.

Transmission

- It is spread by touching fluids from the nose or throat or stool (poop) from an infected person.
- A person is most contagious during the first week of the illness.
- HFMD is not transmitted to or from pets or other animals.
- HFMD occurs mainly in children under 10 years of age, but adults can also get it.
- People usually become immune to the virus causing HFMD after having the infection. However, since several viruses in the enterovirus family can cause HFMD, a person can still catch other strains.
- Individual cases and outbreaks of HFMD occur worldwide, more frequently in summer and early autumn.

Treatment

- Most people recover without medical treatment within 7-10 days. There are no common complications.
- No specific treatment is available for this infection. Antibiotics do not work on viruses. People who are ill may treat the symptoms as needed until the infection goes away.
- Rarely, this illness may be associated with aseptic or viral meningitis, in which the person has fever, headache, stiff neck and back pain, and may need to be hospitalized for a few days.
- Usually, the physician can distinguish between HFMD and other causes of mouth sores. Testing can be done to determine the type of virus, but this is usually not necessary.

Prevention

- Wash hands with soap for 20 seconds after wiping the nose or mouth, after using the bathroom, or changing diapers on a child. Household cleaners may be used to disinfect surfaces often.
- Always use disposable tissues, not handkerchiefs.
- Children are often excluded from child care programs, schools or other group settings during the first few days of the illness. This helps to reduce the spread of infection, but probably will not completely stop it.

Additional Information

HFMD is a different disease from foot and mouth disease of cattle, sheep and swine. Although the names are similar, the two diseases are not related at all, and are caused by different viruses.

All information is general in nature and is not intended to be used as a substitute for appropriate professional advice.



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