
Hand, foot and mouth disease

What is hand, foot and mouth disease?

Hand, foot and mouth disease (HFMD) is a mild viral infection caused by different human viruses, for example, Coxsackie A, enterovirus and echovirus.

HFMD is not the same as the foot and mouth disease of cattle.

How do you get hand, foot and mouth disease?

HFMD is spread when a person touches the mucous or saliva, or the faeces (poo) of an infected person.

Everyone is susceptible to infection, but many adults will have developed immunity to this infection as a child.

Signs and symptoms

The incubation period is usually around 3 to 5 days. The infectious period remains while there is fluid in the blisters. Faeces also remain infectious for several weeks after the onset of illness.

HFMD usually begins with a mild fever and a runny nose.

This is followed by a sore throat and the appearance of a blister-like rash in the mouth and on the hands and feet, which gradually become ulcerated.

Ulcers sometimes appear around the nappy area in babies, but this is less common.

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

See your doctor if you think you have hand, food and mouth disease.

Treatment of hand, foot and mouth disease

No specific treatment is required for this infection. However, treatment may be necessary to relieve symptoms such as blisters in the mouth.

Complications

Complications are rare, but this infection can sometimes cause [viral meningitis](#). This condition can cause fever, headache, stiff neck or back pain and those affected may need hospitalisation.

While you have the infection

- > Children should be excluded from child care, schools or other group settings until the blisters have dried.

How can hand, foot and mouth be prevented?

There is currently no vaccine available for this infection.

You can reduce the risk of getting HFMD by following this advice:

- > Wash your hands with soap and water before preparing food, after changing nappies and after using the toilet.
- > After changing nappies, clean the surface areas of changing mats, and wipe dry. Wipe over the general changing area with a bleach-based household cleaner, as per manufacturer's instructions.

Where to get help

- > See your doctor.
- > Visit a [GP after hours](#).
- > Ring *healthdirect Australia* on 1800 022 222.
- > [Contact your local population health unit](#).

Remember

- > HFMD is spread by contact with the mucous or saliva of an infected person.
- > Complications are rare, but this infection may cause viral meningitis.
- > HFMD can be prevented by good hand hygiene.

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