

## Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease

Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease is generally a mild viral illness caused by viruses called coxsackievirus or enterovirus. It occurs worldwide, mainly in children under 10 years of age but can also occur in older children and adults and is most common in the summer and autumn months.

It is not related to the animal disease called Foot and Mouth Disease.

### What are the symptoms?

This illness may cause no symptoms or only very mild symptoms.

Those symptoms that commonly occur are blisters that start as small red dots and later become ulcers. These blisters usually occur inside the cheek, gums or on the side of the tongue. Infants may develop some blisters in the nappy area.

Children with this illness may have a low grade fever, sore throat, tiredness, feel off colour and not eat for a day or two.

Very rarely, these viruses, particularly coxsackievirus can cause other illnesses affecting the heart, brain (or lining of the brain), lungs or eyes.

**Incubation period:** Between three and seven days.

### How does it spread?

Hand, foot and mouth disease is usually spread by person-to-person contact from the faeces of an infected person to the mouth of the next person by contaminated hands. It may also be spread from the mouth or respiratory system and by direct contact with the fluid in the blisters.

**Infectious period:** The virus may remain in the faeces for several weeks and whilst there is fluid in the blisters, they remain infectious.

### How is it prevented?

There is usually no treatment necessary.

- Good hygiene practices are the most effective way of controlling the spread of this infection:
- Wash hands with soap and water after going to the toilet, before eating, after wiping noses and after changing nappies or soiled clothing
- Avoid sharing cups, eating utensils or items of personal hygiene
- Thoroughly wash any soiled clothing
- Cover the mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing

Children with this illness should be excluded from school or child care until the blisters have dried. The illness should be reported to the director of a child care centre or the school principal.

### Hand Foot and Mouth Disease and Pregnancy

There is no clear evidence to suggest that this illness causes adverse outcomes of pregnancy if the mother develops the illness during pregnancy.

However, babies born to mothers who have symptoms of the illness around the time of delivery are more likely to become infected. Most newborns infected develop mild symptoms but the risk of severe illness is higher during the first two weeks of life.