

## AN IMPORTANT NOTE FROM THE HEALTH OFFICE

### Factsheet on Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease



#### **What is hand, foot and mouth disease?**

Hand, foot and mouth disease (HFMD) is a common illness of infants and children. It is characterized by fever, sores in the mouth and a rash with blisters. HFMD begins with a mild fever, poor appetite, malaise ("feeling sick") and frequently a sore throat. One or two days after the fever begins, sores develop in the mouth. They begin as small red spots that blister and then often become ulcers. They are usually located on the tongue, gums and inside of the cheeks. The skin rash develops over 1-2 days with flat or raised red spots, some with blisters. The rash does not itch, and it is usually located on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet. It may also appear on the buttocks. A person with HFMD may have only the rash or the mouth ulcers.

#### **Is HFMD the same as foot and mouth disease?**

No. 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.

#### **Is HFMD serious?**

Usually not. Nearly all people with HFMD recover without medical treatment. HFMD usually resolves in 7- 10 days. There are no common complications. 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.

#### **What causes HFMD?**

Several different viruses cause HFMD. The most common cause is *Coxsackievirus A16*; occasionally, other strains of *Coxsackievirus A* or *Enterovirus 71* cause HFMD. The coxsackieviruses are members of a group of viruses called the enteroviruses. The enterovirus group includes polioviruses, coxsackieviruses and echoviruses.

#### **Is it contagious?**

Yes. HFMD is moderately contagious. Infection is spread from person-to-person by direct contact with nose and throat discharges or the stool of infected persons. A person is most contagious during the first week of the illness. HFMD is not transmitted to or from pets or other animals.

#### **How soon will someone become ill after getting infected?**

The usual period from infection to onset of symptoms is 3-6 days. Fever is often the first symptom of HFMD.

#### **Who is at risk for HFMD?**

HFMD occurs mainly in children under 10 years of age, but adults may also be at risk. Infection results in immunity to the specific virus, but a second episode may occur following infection with a different member of the enterovirus group.

#### **When and where does HFMD occur?**

Individual cases and outbreaks of HFMD occur worldwide, more frequently in summer and early autumn.

#### **How is HFMD diagnosed?**

HFMD is one of many infections that result in mouth sores. Another common cause is oral herpes virus infection, which produces an inflammation of the mouth and gums (sometimes called stomatitis). Usually, the physician can distinguish between HFMD and other causes of mouth sores based on the age of the patient, the pattern of symptoms reported by the patient or parent and the appearance of the rash and sores on examination. A throat swab or stool specimen may be sent to a laboratory to determine which enterovirus caused the illness. Since the testing often takes 2-4 weeks to obtain a final answer, the physician usually does not order these tests.

#### **How is HFMD treated? Can it be prevented?**

No specific treatment is available for this infection. Symptomatic treatment is given to provide relief from fever, aches and pain from the mouth ulcers. (**Caution:** Aspirin should not be given to children). Using mouthwashes or sprays that numb mouth pain. Preventive measures include frequent hand washing, especially after diaper changes, disinfection of contaminated surfaces by household cleaners and washing soiled articles of clothing. Avoiding close contact such as kissing, hugging, or sharing eating utensils or cups with people with HFMD. Children are often excluded from child care programs, schools or other group settings during the first few days of the illness. These measures may reduce the spread of infection, but they will not completely interrupt it. Persons who are concerned about their symptoms should contact their health care provider.

***This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information contact the AAS Health Office at 231-4488, ext. 3911 or call your Health care provider.***

Information was taken from the CDC information sheet on HFMD.

<http://www.cdc.gov/hand-foot-mouth/about/index.html>