

# *Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease*

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## What is hand, foot and mouth disease?

Hand, foot and mouth disease is a common viral illness of infants and children.

## How do I get hand, foot and mouth disease?

Hand, foot and mouth disease is a viral illness spread from person to person by direct contact with nose and throat discharges, saliva, fluid from blisters, or the stool of infected persons. This disease occurs mainly in children under ten years old, but may also occur in adults. Everyone is at risk of infection, but not everyone who is infected becomes ill. Infants, children and adolescents are more likely to be susceptible to infection and illness from this virus.

## Symptoms

Symptoms of hand, foot and mouth disease include fever, sores in the mouth, and a rash with blisters. The usual period from the time of exposure to onset of symptoms (“incubation period”) is 3 to 7 days. Fever is often the first symptom. Symptoms occur in two stages.

The first stage may last 1-2 days. Symptoms include:

- Mild fever
- Poor appetite
- Malaise (“feeling sick”)
- Sore throat

Second stage symptoms begin about 1-2 days after the fever begins. Symptoms include:

- Painful sores develop in the mouth. The sores 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 to 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 hand, foot and mouth disease may have only the rash or the mouth ulcers.

## How long is an infected person contagious (able to spread the disease)?

Hand, foot and mouth disease is moderately contagious; a person is most contagious during the first week of the illness. An infected individual should cover his/her mouth and nose when coughing/sneezing and tissues should be used whenever possible; soiled tissues should be properly disposed. This disease is not transmitted to or from pets or other animals. Children with this illness do not need to be excluded from child care or school settings.

## Prevention

- Preventive measures include frequent hand washing with warm water and soap, especially before eating and food preparation and after diaper changing, and disinfecting contaminated surfaces using a diluted solution of chlorine-containing bleach (made by mixing approximately ¼ cup of bleach with 1 gallon of water).
- Avoidance of close contact (kissing, hugging, sharing utensils, etc.) with infected individuals may also help to reduce the risk of infection.

## Treatment

- No specific treatment is available for this infection. Symptomatic treatment is given to provide relief from fever, aches, or pain from the mouth ulcers. Acetaminophen or ibuprofen may help with this.

