

Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease



What is Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease?

Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease is a common childhood viral illness that can affect adults. This is quite different from Foot and Mouth disease (which is a disease of animals).

What is the incubation period?

The incubation period is three – five days. The person will remain infectious during the acute illness and while the virus remains in the faeces. Infection generally leads to immunity.

It is communicable immediately before and during the acute stage of the illness, and perhaps longer as the virus may be present in the faeces for weeks.

What are the symptoms?

The onset of the disease generally presents as:

- Fever
- Malaise
- Sore mouth
- Development of a rash.
- Mouth lesions appear on the inside surfaces of the cheeks, gums and on the sides of the tongue.
- Raised pink spots that develop into blisters, which may persist for seven to ten days, can also occur as a rash, especially on the palms, fingers, soles and occasionally on the buttocks.

Is it infectious?

The disease is self-limiting and more common in summer and early autumn, mainly in children under ten years of age, but adult cases are not unusual. The disease frequently occurs in outbreaks in groups of children, in a nursery school for example.

The virus is spread by direct contact with nasal and throat secretions or faeces of the infected person. The virus can also be transmitted by aerosol spread such as:

- Coughing and sneezing.
- Hands contaminated from secretions which, if not washed thoroughly may transmit infection.

What is the treatment?

There is no specific treatment for the infection.

The illness is mild and usually clears up by itself in seven to ten days. To help with the symptoms:

- Keep the child cool
- Encourage fluids to prevent dehydration (but avoid acidic drinks like fruit juice)
- Encourage soft foods like ice cream, yoghurt may or soup.
- Give Paracetamol at the dose recommended for the child's age on the box or by the pharmacist. Aspirin must not be given to children under 16 years old.

How can spread be prevented?

There is no requirement to exclude children with Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease if they are well enough to attend. A good standard of hand, personal and food hygiene should be maintained and care when handling articles contaminated with respiratory secretions or faeces, such as tissues, nappies etc. should be encouraged. Hands should be washed after contact with any of the above. These are measures which should be encouraged at all times to prevent this and many other infections.

There is a slight risk to pregnant women and they may wish to avoid close contact with a child during the course of their work activities. Pregnant women who develop any symptoms of rashes during pregnancy should seek advice from their general practitioner or midwife. This is a self-limiting illness and there are no effective treatments for this virus. Treating the symptoms will help and the illness will run its course. Should the person develop the rare additional symptoms of high fever, headache, stiff neck, or back pain or other complications then they need to see a doctor urgently.

More information on Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease can be found in chapter nine of the **Health protection in schools and childcare facilities** guidance.