



Island County Public Health

Communicable Disease Program

Hand, Foot, and Mouth Disease (HFMD)

You are being provided with this fact sheet:

- because you or your child may have been exposed to HFMD.** If you believe your child has HFMD contact your healthcare provider. Notify your childcare provider or school if a diagnosis of HFMD is made.
- for informational purposes only.**

What is hand, foot, and mouth disease?

Hand, foot, and mouth disease (HFMD) is a common viral illness among infants and children younger than 5 years of age but may also occur in older children and adults. It is most common in the summer and fall. Despite the similarity in names, hand, foot, and mouth disease is a completely different infection than foot-and-mouth (or hoof-and-mouth) disease, which occurs only in animals and is caused by another type of virus.

What are symptoms of hand, foot, and mouth disease?

Symptoms of HFMD may include a skin rash with small blisters that are most commonly found on the hands, feet, and buttocks. Blisters may also be present inside the mouth, which can make it difficult to eat or drink. Other symptoms include a low-grade fever, sore throat, runny nose, increased drooling, and/or cough. Some people may show no symptoms at all, but they can still pass the virus to others. The infection usually goes away without any serious complications within 7 to 10 days. In rare occasions, complications of viral meningitis or encephalitis may occur.

How is hand, foot, and mouth disease spread?

HFMD can be passed through nose secretions or throat discharge, saliva, fluid from blisters, stool, and respiratory droplets sprayed after a cough or sneeze. A person is most contagious during the first week of the illness but may stay contagious for several weeks afterwards. The time between becoming infected and the start of symptoms is usually between 3 and 7 days. The illness is very contagious and can spread quickly at schools and childcare centers.

Who may become ill with hand, foot, and mouth disease?

HFMD can affect anyone, but most cases occur in children under 5 years old. Adults have typically been exposed to the viruses causing HFMD earlier in life and are less likely to become infected. Infection results in immunity (protection) to the specific virus that caused the illness. Since several different viruses can cause HFMD, a person is not completely immune to the disease and can get a case of HFMD again.

How is hand, foot, and mouth disease treated?

There is no specific treatment available for HFMD. Over-the-counter medications, such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen, can be used to relieve fever and pain caused by mouth sores. *Never give aspirin to a child*, as this has been associated with Reye Syndrome. Mouth sores may make it painful to swallow, so a child may not want to drink, but it is important to drink to stay hydrated.

See a healthcare provider if:

- Child is not able to drink normally and there are concerns about dehydration
- Child's fever lasts longer than 3 days
- Child has a weakened immune system
- Symptoms are severe
- Child is very young (younger than 6 months of age)

How can the spread of hand, foot, and mouth disease be reduced?

- Make sure children and adults use good handwashing practices, especially after changing diapers and using the toilet. Use hand sanitizer when soap and water are not available.
- Disinfect common areas and frequently touched surfaces. First, clean with soap and water. Next, disinfect with a diluted solution of chlorine bleach and water. Follow a regular schedule as the virus can live for days on surfaces.
- Do not touch eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands. A person can get infected if they touch their eyes, nose, or mouth if they have the virus on their hands.

When does a child need to stay home from childcare or school?

A child should not attend childcare or school if one or more of the following applies:

- Mouth sores with drooling
- Fever (defined as temperature above 100.4°F)
- Oozing, fluid-filled blisters
- Do not feel well enough to participate in classroom activities

Adapted from materials developed by Snohomish County Health Department and Public Health — Seattle & King County.

References

- Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, Hand, Foot, and Mouth Disease (HFMD): <https://www.cdc.gov/hand-foot-mouth/>
- Mayo Clinic, Hand-Foot-and-Mouth Disease: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/hand-foot-and-mouth-disease/doctors-departments/ddc-20353043>
- Child Care Health Program – Public Health Seattle & King County: <https://kingcounty.gov/depts/health/child-teen-health/child-care-health/disease-prevention.aspx>
- Child Care Health Outreach – Snohomish County Health Department: [Disease Fact Sheets for Child Care Providers | Snohomish County Health Department, WA \(snohd.org\)](https://www.snohd.org/disease-fact-sheets-for-child-care-providers)

This document was published by Island County Public Health. It is for information only and is not meant as a substitute for consultation with your healthcare provider. This document was updated in October 2023. This document is not valid after October 2024.