

HAND, FOOT, AND MOUTH DISEASE

Hand, foot, and mouth disease is a viral infection that causes a blister-like rash involving the hands, feet, and mouth. The infection occurs most commonly in children less than 10 years of age and most often in the summer and fall months. Outbreaks may occur in childcare settings and preschools.

- CAUSE** Coxsackievirus, most often A16 (an enterovirus).
- SYMPTOMS** Low-grade fever lasting 1 to 2 days, runny nose, and/or sore throat. Blister-like rash occurs in the mouth, on the sides of the tongue, inside the cheeks, and on the gums. These sores may last 7 to 10 days. Blister-like rash may occur on the palms and fingers of the hands and on the soles of the feet. The disease is usually self-limited, but in rare cases has been fatal in infants.
- SPREAD** The viruses leave the body through the stool of an infected person and enter another person when hands, food, or objects (such as toys) contaminated with stool are placed in the mouth. It also is spread through droplets that are expelled from the nose and mouth of an infected person during sneezing and coughing and by direct contact with respiratory secretions.
- INCUBATION** It usually takes 3 to 6 days after exposure for symptoms to begin.
- CONTAGIOUS PERIOD** During the first week of illness and possibly for several weeks after illness. Virus may be shed for several weeks in stool. Infected persons who may not seem sick are able to spread the virus.
- EXCLUSION** Childcare and School: Until fever is gone and child is well enough to participate in routine activities (sores or rash may still be present).
- TREATMENT** No specific treatment.

PREVENTION/CONTROL

- Cover nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing and sneezing or cough/sneeze into your sleeve. Dispose of used tissues.
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm running water after using the bathroom, after changing diapers, after handling anything soiled with stool or secretions from the nose or mouth, and before preparing food or eating. **Thorough handwashing is the best way to prevent the spread of communicable diseases.** Staff should closely monitor handwashing of all children after children have used the bathroom or have been diapered.
- Clean and disinfect diapering area and potty chairs after each use and bathroom toilets, sinks, and toys at least daily and when soiled. Clean and sanitize mouthed toys, objects, and surfaces at least daily and when soiled. (See pgs 34-36.)

For more information, call your school nurse.