UK Health Security Agency

Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease Factsheet

What is Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease?

Hand, foot and mouth disease is a common illness caused by a virus.

It mostly affects young children, but adults can get it too.

Most people:

- feel unwell for a few days
- get better within 7 to 10 days

This illness is usually mild.

- most people recover fully
- most do not need medical treatment

This illness is not the same as the disease farm animals get.

How Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease spreads

The virus spreads easily through:

- coughs and sneezes
- touching blisters or spots
- contact with poo (for example, during nappy changes or helping a child use the toilet)

- a person can spread the virus even before they feel unwell
- the virus can stay in poo for several weeks, so it's important to continue handwashing after symptoms have finished
- different viruses can cause this illness, so it is possible to get it more than once

Symptoms

Your child may have:

- a mild fever (feels hot)
- a sore throat
- small painful spots or blisters in the mouth
- a rash with small spots or blisters on the hands, feet, or bottom

Symptoms usually start a few days (3 to 5 days) after catching the virus.

How to protect yourself and others

- keep your child at home if they feel unwell or have a fever
- they can go back when they feel well enough to play, eat, and join in

Keeping your child away from other children for longer is unlikely to stop the illness spreading.

Help prevent infection and reduce the spread to others:

- wash hands often with soap and water
- teach children to cover coughs and sneezes
- clean toys and surfaces often
- do not share cups, towels, or cutlery

Extra care with handwashing is recommended around newborns, pregnant women and people with weakened immune systems, although serious illness remains uncommon.

Treatments

There is no medicine to cure hand, food and mouth disease. To help your child feel better, you can:

- give paracetamol or ibuprofen for pain or fever
- offer soft foods if their mouth is sore
- offer drinks often (like water or milk) to stop dehydration

Antibiotics do not work for this illness (it is caused by a virus)

When to get medical advice

It's important to trust your instincts if you or your child is unwell. Get medical help if you think you need it.

Contact your GP for an urgent appointment or call 111 if:

- you or your child has a very high temperature, or feels hot, cold or shivery
- you're worried about your child's hand, foot and mouth disease symptoms
- your child has hand, foot and mouth disease and is peeing less than usual (they may be becoming dehydrated)

Further advice

You can find more information here: https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/hand-foot-mouth-disease/