

Hand, foot and mouth disease

What is hand, foot and mouth disease?

Hand, foot and mouth disease is an infection caused by the Coxsackie virus. Though it mostly affects young children, it can occur at any age. Outbreaks are most common in the summer and fall.

What are the symptoms?

Hand, foot and mouth disease is usually not a severe illness. It can cause:

- fever,
- small, painful ulcers in the mouth,
- a skin rash that looks like red spots, often with small blisters on top, that appear on the hands (palms) and feet (soles), buttocks and sometimes other places on the body,
- headache,
- sore throat,
- loss of appetite,
- lack of energy,
- vomiting and/or diarrhea.

How does hand, foot and mouth disease spread?

Hand, foot and mouth disease is most contagious during the first week of illness. It spreads through contact with an infected person's saliva or stool. Germs can get on a person's hands or other objects and then spread into someone's mouth, causing infection. The virus can be found in a person's stool for up to 4 weeks after the start of the illness.

Hand, foot and mouth disease is not spread by animals.

[Handwashing](#) is the best way to prevent the spread of infection.

What can parents do?

There is no treatment for the infection. [Antibiotics won't help it go away faster](#). It can last for 7 to 10 days.

- Keep your child comfortable and offer plenty of food and liquids. If your child has sores in their mouth, offer cold, bland liquids such as milk or water. Do not give fruit juice because it will sting.
- Acetaminophen or ibuprofen can help reduce the discomfort caused by mouth sores. Sometimes the pain can be so severe that your doctor will have to provide a prescription pain reliever.
- Make sure everyone in your house washes their hands with soap and water after changing a diaper, blowing their nose (or a child's nose), and using the toilet, and before preparing and eating food.
- Do not pop the blisters; they will heal on their own.

- Although hand, foot and mouth disease is most contagious in the early stage, [the virus can be transmitted from blisters and secretions](#) (such as saliva, sputum or nasal mucus). Children should stay home from school and child care if they have symptoms.
- [Wash toys and surfaces](#) in your home regularly.

Call your doctor if your child:

- Is vomiting and showing any [sign of dehydration](#), such as:
 - no tears when crying.
 - dry skin, mouth and tongue.
 - less or no urine (fewer than 4 wet diapers in 24 hours).
 - refusing food and/or fluids for 4-8 hours because of mouth sores.
- Is breathing rapidly.
- Has a severe sore throat.
- Has a severe headache, especially with vomiting, confusion or unusual sleepiness.

Reviewed by the following CPS committees:

- Public Education Advisory Committee

Last Updated: **May 2019**

https://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/hand_foot_and_mouth_disease