



Hand, Foot and Mouth Syndrome

What causes Hand, Foot and Mouth Syndrome?

Hand, Foot and Mouth Syndrome (HFMS) is primarily a common childhood illness. However, adults can get it too. HFMS is caused by an enterovirus. Persons may develop the disease when they make direct contact with the saliva, blister fluid or stool of an infected person. Persons with HFMS are most contagious during the first week of the illness, but transmission can persist for weeks after symptoms resolve.

What are the symptoms?

First, the child will begin “feeling sick” with a poor appetite, a sore throat and a fever. About one to two days later, the child will develop painful sores in the mouth. These sores begin as small, red spots that turn to ulcers. Possibly, a skin rash will develop next. This rash will be flat or raised red spots, maybe even blisters, but will not itch. The rash is usually located on the hands and soles of the feet but may also appear on the buttocks.

How is it diagnosed and treated?

If someone develops symptoms, he should see a health care provider, since there are other illnesses that display similar symptoms. Diagnosis typically occurs following a visual inspection for blisters on the hands, feet or in the mouth. Specimens may be obtained from throat or stool to verify diagnosis. No antibiotic treatment is available for this infection, but treatments may be recommended to help with discomfort from the fever, aches or mouth ulcers.

School or Child Care Attendance

Children may be excluded from school or child care centers for the first few days of the illness or longer if they have blisters in the mouth and they drool, or if they have weeping blisters on their hands.

Home, School or Child Care Precautions

Careful hand washing, especially after wiping a runny nose, changing a diaper or helping a child use the toilet, will prevent the spread of this disease and many other common infections that occur in schools and child care centers. Diaper changing surfaces, toilet areas, sinks and faucets should be cleaned frequently with a sanitizing solution, such as bleach and water. Toys and other objects likely to be mouthed by children should also be cleaned regularly.

For more information, contact the Guilford County Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Public Health at (336) 641-7777 or www.myguilford.com