

# Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease (HFMD)



## Who gets Hand, Foot and Mouth disease?

The disease usually occurs in children under 10, being more common in the younger age groups.

## What is Hand, Foot and Mouth disease (HFMD)?

HFMD is a viral infection caused by a group of enteroviruses. The Coxsackie Virus commonly results in a blistering rash on the hands, feet, mouth and buttocks.

## How is it spread?

The disease is spread by direct contact with discharges from infected people's nose/mouth or faeces. It also spreads by contact with fluid from the blisters.

## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms can include fever, malaise and sore throat, which may appear 3-5 days after exposure, usually followed by the rash 1-2 days later. The rash usually fades after 7-10 days.

## How long are people contagious?

From a few days before the first symptoms appear until about 1 week after the rash appears. The virus can continue to be shed from the nose for 3-4 weeks and from faeces for 5-6 weeks.





## How is the condition diagnosed?

On clinical grounds. Laboratory tests can be performed, but they are costly, and results can take a long time.

## Does infection give immunity?

This does occur. However, infections with different virus subtypes are possible. In addition, unlike chickenpox, it is relatively common for children to have more than one episode of HFMD.

## What is the treatment?

There is no specific treatment other than for symptoms, including control of fever, maintaining hydration and using gels for mouth ulcers.

## What are the complications?

The illness is usually mild, the most significant risk being dehydration in the young. Serious complications are very uncommon.

## What can be done to prevent its spread?

Children with symptoms or rash should be excluded from public places/school/child care until ten days after the onset of symptoms. Thorough hand washing, cleaning of toys and care taken whilst changing diapers are all important. Do not swim until six weeks after the infection. Parents should take special care with their hygiene, as HFMD can worsen in adults.

## Is there a risk for pregnant women?

This is uncertain, and pregnant women are advised to consult their specialist.

