



3100 23rd St. Suite T. Columbus, NE 68601 Phone: 402-562-5400 www.columbusurgentcare.org

Hand, Foot & Mouth Disease

There is no vaccine to prevent the disease. However, you can take simple steps like washing your hands often and practicing good hygiene to reduce your risk of infection.

Hand, foot, and mouth disease, or HFMD, is a contagious illness that is caused by different viruses. Infants and children younger than 5 years old are more likely to get this disease. However, older children and adults can also get it. In the United States it is more common for people to get HFMD from spring to fall.

What Are the Symptoms of HFMD?

Symptoms usually begin with a fever, reduced appetite, sore throat, and a feeling of being unwell. A day or two after the fever starts, painful sores can develop in the mouth. A skin rash with flat red spots may also develop on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet. Sometimes a rash also occurs on the knees, elbows, and buttocks. This rash may blister but won't itch.

Not everyone will get all of these symptoms. Some people may show no symptoms at all, but they can still pass the virus to others.

Is HFMD Serious?

HFMD is usually not serious. The illness is typically mild, and nearly all patients recover in 7 to 10 days without medical treatment. Complications are uncommon.

Rarely, an infected person can develop viral meningitis (characterized by fever, headache, stiff neck, or back pain) and may need to be hospitalized for a few days. Other even more rare complications can include polio-like paralysis, or encephalitis (brain inflammation) which can be fatal.

Is HFMD Contagious?

Yes. The viruses that cause HFMD can be found in an infected person's:

- nose and throat secretions (such as saliva, sputum, or nasal mucus),
- blister fluid, and
- feces (poop).

HFMD spreads from an infected person to others through:

- close contact, such as kissing, hugging, or sharing cups and eating utensils,
- coughing and sneezing,
- contact with feces, for example when changing a diaper,
- contact with blister fluid, and
- touching objects or surfaces that have the virus on them.



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People with HFMD are most contagious during the first week of their illness. However, they may be contagious for weeks after symptoms go away. Some people, especially adults, may not develop any symptoms, but they can still spread the viruses to others.

Who Is at Risk for HFMD?

HFMD mostly affects infants and children younger than 5 years old. However, older children and adults can get it, too. When someone gets HFMD, they develop immunity to the specific virus that caused their infection. However, because HFMD is caused by several different viruses, people can get the disease again.

Can HFMD Be Treated?

There is no specific treatment for HFMD. Fever and pain can be managed with over-the-counter fever reducers and pain relievers, such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen. It is important for people with HFMD to drink enough fluids to prevent dehydration (loss of body fluids).