

Hand-Foot-and-Mouth Disease

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What is hand-foot-and-mouth disease?

A common viral infection that causes outbreaks of the disease in the summer and fall. Despite its scary name, this illness generally is mild.

What are the signs or symptoms?

- Tiny blisters in the mouth and on the fingers, palms of hands, buttocks, and soles of feet that last a little longer than a week (one, few, or all of these may be present).
- May see common cold signs or symptoms with fever, sore throat, runny nose, and cough. The most troublesome finding often are the blisters in the mouth, which make it difficult for the child to eat or drink. Other signs or symptoms such as vomiting and diarrhea can occur, but are less frequently troublesome.

What are the incubation and contagious periods?

- Incubation period: 3 to 6 days.
- Contagious period: Virus may be shed for several weeks after the infection starts; respiratory shedding of the virus is usually limited to a week or less.

How is it spread?

- Respiratory route (i.e. cough, sneezing)
- Direct contact
- Fecal-oral route

How do you control it?

- Teach children and caregivers/teachers to cover their mouths and noses when sneezing or coughing with a disposable facial tissue if possible, or with a shoulder if no facial tissue is available in time ("give your cough or sneeze a cold shoulder"). Teach everyone to wash hands right after using facial tissues or having contact with mucus and to change or cover contaminated clothing to prevent the spread of disease by contaminated hands.
- Dispose of facial tissues that contain nasal secretions after each use.
- Practice good hand washing, especially after diaper changing.

What are the roles of the caregiver/teacher and the family?

- Report the infection to staff designated by the child care program or school for decision making and action related to care of ill children. That person, in turn, alerts possibly exposed family members and staff to watch for symptoms.
- Encourage the family to seek medical advice if the child is very uncomfortable with signs of illness from the infection, such as an inability to drink or eat, or if the child seems very ill.

Exclude from group setting?

No, unless

- The child is unable to participate and staff determine that they cannot care for the child without compromising their ability to care for the health and safety of the other children in the group.
- The child meets other exclusion criteria, such as fever with behavior change.
- Note: Exclusion will not reduce disease transmission because some children may shed the virus without becoming recognizably ill, and the virus may be shed for weeks in the stool after the child seems well.

Readmit to group setting?

- When exclusion criteria are resolved, the child is able to participate, and staff determine that they can care for the child without compromising their ability to care for the health and safety of the other children in the group.