

HAND, FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE (COXSACKIEVIRUS)



What is Hand, foot and mouth disease?

Hand, foot and mouth disease is an infection that is usually caused by a virus called the coxsackie A virus.

How is it spread?

It is mainly spread by direct contact with nose and throat discharges and feces of infected persons (who may be asymptomatic) and by aerosol droplet spread.

What are the signs and symptoms?

It usually affects children under 10 years of age and starts with a feeling of general malaise. Some may have low grade fever and a loss of appetite, followed by a sore throat and small spots inside the mouth. These spots soon progress into small mouth ulcers. A day or so later, small spots usually appear on the hands and feet and sometimes on the buttocks, legs and genitals, but rarely on other parts of the body. The spots are similar to chickenpox but are smaller and tender and usually not itchy. The fever and spots usually clear within a few days but the mouth ulcers may last up to a week. In a very small number of cases, the virus can cause more severe illness such as inflammation of the heart muscle or brain.

What is the incubation period and how long is it communicable?

The symptoms start 3-6 days after being infected from another person. It is infectious until spots and mouth ulcers have disappeared. However, children remain mildly infectious for several weeks as the virus may be passed through the feces.

How can Hand, Foot and Mouth disease be prevented?

It is impractical to exclude children from school or nursery once the symptoms are gone. However, it is sensible to maintain good hygiene to reduce the chance of passing on the virus. Give careful attention to prompt hand washing when handling discharges, feces and any soiled articles. It is recommended to use spray bottles to apply the disinfectant (1 part bleach to 9 parts cool water; prepared daily) to contaminated surfaces such as toilets, sinks, floors, tables, water fountains or any areas where a sick individual has been.

What should I do about it?

Persons who have these symptoms should see their physicians. NEVER GIVE ASPIRIN TO A CHILD as it may cause a rare but serious complication called Reye's syndrome. A child may return to school/daycare once the fever and the spots/mouth ulcers have disappeared.

Clusters of two or more persons are considered a reportable disease to the Santa Rosa County Health Department (SRCHD).

For more information, please contact the SRCHD at 850-983-5200.