

## **Hand, Foot, and Mouth Disease (Coxsackievirus)**

**Hand, foot, and mouth** disease is a common illness of infants and children. It is caused by a group of viruses called enteroviruses, most commonly coxsackievirus. It usually begins with mild fever, poor appetite, malaise, and sore throat. One or two days after the fever begins, sores develop in the mouth, usually on the tongue, gums, and inside of the cheeks. A skin rash, usually located on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet, with flat or raised red spots and sometimes blisters, develops over 1–2 days. The rash doesn't itch. Most people get sick 3–7 days after being exposed to the virus.

Hand, foot, and mouth disease is usually mild, and nearly all patients recover without medical treatment in 7–10 days. Rarely, the patient with coxsackievirus infection may also develop viral meningitis and be hospitalized. Symptoms to watch for are fever, headache, stiff neck, or back pain.

**Transmission:** Both adults and children can become ill with hand, foot, and mouth disease, but it is most common among children under 10. Infection is spread person-to-person by direct or indirect contact with stool, nose and throat discharges, saliva, or fluid from the blisters. The virus can be transmitted from hands or objects to other people's hands and mouths. A person is most contagious during the first week of the illness, but people can shed the virus for many weeks, especially in the stool.

**Diagnosis:** Diagnosis is usually based on signs and symptoms. A throat swab or stool specimen may be sent to a laboratory to determine which enterovirus caused the illness, but since testing often takes 2–4 weeks, these tests are usually not ordered.

**Treatment:** No specific treatment is available for hand, foot, and mouth disease, although healthcare providers may provide treatment to relieve symptoms.

**School attendance guidelines:** There is no need to exclude anyone who is well enough to attend School.

**Reporting requirements:** Hand, foot, and mouth disease is not reportable to local or state health authorities.

**Notification guidelines:** When hand, foot, and mouth disease occurs in a school, the school nurse and school physician should determine, based on their judgment, whether some or all parents/guardians and staff should be notified. When necessary, they may consult with DPH or the local board of health. Parent/guardian notification should also be discussed with the school administrator.

**Prevention guidelines:** Follow strict handwashing and personal hygiene procedures. Always wash hands after using the bathroom, after diapering or assisting a student in the bathroom, and before eating or handling food. Careful attention to environmental cleaning and sanitation is also very important in reducing spread.