

# Hand, foot and mouth disease

## What causes hand, foot and mouth disease (HFMD)?

HFMD is a viral infection most commonly caused by the coxsackie virus. It is mainly seen in children under the age of 10. It rarely causes further complications. HFMD is not linked to the foot and mouth disease which affects animals.

## Signs and symptoms

- Fever
- Sore throat
- Small blisters on the inside of the mouth, the sides of the tongue, palms of the hands, fingers, soles of feet and nappy area. The blisters should not be itchy.
- Poor appetite
- Lethargy

Symptoms usually start 3 to 7 days after catching the infection. Symptoms can last between 7 to 10 days and admission to hospital is rarely needed.

## How does it spread?

It is easily spread from one person to another by coughing and sneezing as well as by coming in contact with fluid from inside the blisters. It can also be in faeces (poo) for up to several weeks after being infected.

Washing your hands after touching bodily fluids such as fluids from the nose, mouth and chest as well as from inside the blisters, is the best way of preventing HFMD from spreading. Do not share items such as cutlery, drinking cups, toothbrushes or towels.

## Treatment

There is no specific treatment as it is a virus and antibiotics will not work. Complications of HFMD (viral meningitis, encephalitis and a poliomyelitis like paralysis) are all extremely rare.

## Care at home

- Eating and drinking can be painful because of the mouth blisters.
- Ask your doctor or pharmacist about what medicines are good to use as pain relief for the mouth blisters.
- Give your child frequent sips of fluid as this will help stop them from becoming dehydrated.
- Do not pop the blisters – leave them to dry naturally.



## How long is your child infectious?

Your child should stay home from school, playgroup, kindergarten and childcare until the fluid in the blisters has dried.

## When to seek medical attention

- If your child has symptoms of a headache or stiff neck.
- If your child's condition is not improving.
- If you are concerned your child is not drinking enough and becoming dehydrated.



Government of **Western Australia**  
Child and Adolescent Health Service

**Child and Adolescent Health Service**  
15 Hospital Avenue, Nedlands, WA, 6009.  
Telephone: (08) 6456 2222  
Produced by: Emergency Department  
Ref: 515 © CAHS 2016 Revised 2022

**This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with a disability.**

**Disclaimer:** This publication is for general education and information purposes. Contact a qualified healthcare professional for any medical advice needed.  
© State of Western Australia, Child and Adolescent Health Service.