



Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease (Coxsackievirus)

What is hand, foot and mouth disease?

Hand, foot and mouth disease is a viral infection that is moderately contagious. It mainly affects children under the age of 10 years but can occur at any age. It is usually a mild infection that commonly occurs in the summer and early fall in this province.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms can vary from person to person and may include:

- Fever
- Loss of appetite
- Sores in the mouth and throat
- A skin rash that:
 - might appear on the palms of the hands, soles of the feet and buttocks;
 - starts as small, flat, red dots that may turn into bumps or blisters; and,
 - may sometimes be mistaken for chickenpox or strep throat.

Some, including most adults, may have no symptoms

How is hand, foot and mouth disease spread?

It can be spread by direct contact with nose and throat secretions, the feces and the skin lesions of an infected person. The virus may also spread when an infected person touches objects and surfaces that are then touched by others. It spreads easily in child care facilities and where children are close together.

How long are people infectious?

Infected persons are most infectious during the first week of the illness.

What is the treatment for hand, foot and mouth disease?

There is no specific treatment. Since it is viral, no antibiotics are required. Keep the child comfortable by treating the symptoms as follows:

- Control pain and/or fever with medication suitable for the child's age
- Offer age-appropriate cool fluids frequently (avoid citrus/acidic juices)
- Offer soft foods (apple sauce, mashed potatoes, puddings, yogurt)
- Avoid products that freeze the mouth such as benzocaine (Orajel®)

Seek medical attention if you are concerned that your child is dehydrated or the condition is worsening.

How can the spread of hand, foot and mouth disease be prevented?

- **Hand hygiene** is the single most important way to prevent the spread of the virus, clean hands often especially after changing diapers and using the toilet.
- Avoiding close contact such as kissing, hugging, or sharing eating utensils or cups with an infected person.
- Clean objects and surfaces (toys, doorknobs, etc.) that may be contaminated.
- Stay at home when ill. Children can attend school or child care if the child feels well enough to take part in activities.

If you require further information, contact your local public health nurse.