

Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease

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Hand, foot and mouth disease is a viral illness with a sudden onset of symptoms.

The illness can be a mild or very serious and appears most often in warm weather – usually in summer or early autumn.

Anyone can get hand, foot and mouth disease, but it is most common in children under 10. Preschool children tend to become more unwell than other age groups.

*Human hand, foot and mouth disease is **not** related to foot and mouth disease in animals.*

What to do if you're pregnant

Hand, foot and mouth disease is rare in healthy adults and the risk of complications to a baby during pregnancy is very low.

However, if a pregnant woman gets the illness shortly before giving birth, the infection can be passed on to the baby. Most babies born with hand, foot and mouth disease have only mild symptoms.

In very rare cases it is possible that hand, foot and mouth disease during pregnancy may result in miscarriage or could affect the baby's development. If a pregnant woman has contact with the illness or develops any kind of rash, she should see her doctor or lead maternity carer.

What are the symptoms?

Mild fever is usually the first sign of hand, foot and mouth disease. This starts 3 to 5 days after your child has been exposed to the disease.

After the fever starts, your child may develop other symptoms, including:

- painful red blisters on the tongue, mouth, palms of the hands, or soles of the feet;
- loss of appetite;
- a sore throat and mouth; and
- a general feeling of weakness or tiredness.

The disease is usually mild and lasts 3 to 7 days. It can be confused with:

- chickenpox - but the chickenpox rash is all over the body; or
- cold sores in a child's mouth.

How is it caught or spread?

Hand, foot and mouth disease is spread by coughing or sneezing, or by contact with mucus, saliva, blisters or the bowel movements of an infected person.

Children with the illness are infectious for around 7 to 10 days.

How is it treated?

The only medicine recommended for the illness is paracetamol.

Most blisters disappear without causing problems. However in the mouth, some may form shallow, painful sores that look similar to cold sores. If your child's mouth is sore, don't give them sour, salty or spicy foods.

Make sure they drink plenty of liquids to avoid getting dehydrated.

Call Healthline 0800 611 116 if you are unsure what you should do.

Can it be prevented?

Keep your child home from childcare or school until the fever is gone and their mouth sores have healed.

If your child has only a few blisters on their hands or feet (and none in their mouth) they could attend childcare or school if the blisters can be covered and they're feeling well.

Frequent hand washing helps decrease the chance of becoming infected.

Staying away from others who have the disease and not sharing toys during the infection also helps prevent the disease.