

## *Hand, Foot, and Mouth Disease*

### *What is Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease?*

HFMD is characterized by fever, sores in the mouth, and a rash with blisters. It begins with a mild fever, poor appetite, malaise ("feeling sick"), and frequently a sore throat. Painful sores develop on the tongue, gums or cheeks. They frequently blister and then often become ulcers. The skin rash develops over 1 to 2 days with flat or raised red spots, some with blisters. The rash does not itch, and it is usually located on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet and the diaper area. The usual period from infection to onset of symptoms ("incubation period") is 3 to 7 days. Fever is often the first symptom of HFMD.

Viruses from the group called enteroviruses cause HFMD. The most common cause is coxsackievirus A16. But there are other viruses that can cause it, so a child may get it more than once.

It most commonly occurs in the late summer and fall.

### *Is HFMD contagious?*

Yes, HFMD is contagious. Infection is spread from person to person by direct contact with nose and throat discharges, saliva, fluid from blisters, or the stool of infected persons. A person is most contagious during the first week of the illness. HFMD is not transmitted to or from pets or other animals.

### *Who is at risk for HFMD?*

HFMD occurs mainly in children under 10 years old, but may also occur in adults too. Everyone is at risk of infection, but not everyone who is infected becomes ill. Infants, children, and adolescents are more likely to be susceptible to infection and illness from these viruses.

### *How is HFMD treated?*

Symptomatic treatment is given to provide relief from fever, aches, or pain from the mouth ulcers. Acetaminophen (Tylenol) or Ibuprofen (Motrin) may provide some relief. Maintaining hydration is important, particularly in smaller children. Avoiding spicy foods, citrus (acidic beverages), and excessive salt may make the child more comfortable.

### *Can HFMD be prevented?*

The risk of infection can be lowered by good hygienic practices, including frequent hand washing, especially after diaper changes, and cleaning of contaminated surfaces and soiled items first with soap and water. Avoidance of close contact (kissing, hugging, sharing utensils, etc.) with children with HFMD may also help to reduce the risk of infection to caregivers.