Hand, foot, and mouth disease

Hand, foot, and mouth disease is caused by several types of viruses, primarily coxsackievirus A16.

The symptoms are similar to the common cold with a rash.

The rash appears as blisters or ulcers in the mouth, on the inner cheeks, gums, sides of the tongue, as bumps or blisters on the hands, feet, and sometimes other parts of the skin. The skin rash may last for up to ten days. There is no specific treatment.

Anyone can get hand, foot, and mouth disease.

Young children are primarily affected with outbreaks occurring among groups of children especially in early years settings and primary schools mostly in summer and autumn; it may also affect adolescents and adults. Symptoms/ signs normally appear three to five days after exposure.

Hand, foot, and mouth disease is usually spread through personal contact.

It may be spread when people shed the virus in their faeces and by the respiratory tract from the mouth or by saliva on hands or toys. The virus has also been found in skin blisters. The infection spreads easily during the stage of illness when people feel ill, but it can be spread for several weeks after initial infection.

Prevent/ control the spread of hand, foot, and mouth disease by:

- Washing hands well, especially after going to the toilet, changing/ handling nappies or other stool-soiled material.
- Covering the mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing.
- Washing toys and other surfaces that have saliva on them.
- Excluding children from child care or school if there is a fever, or ulcers in the mouth and the child is drooling.

Parents and carers of pupils suspected of having the disease should be asked to contact their GP/ Health Centre.

Exclusion

The Health Protection Agency advise there is normally no reason to exclude. In the event of several cases, contact the Heath Protection Agency for advice (0117 900 2620).

Further information: NHS Choices

HS/JB

Dec 2006

Page revised July 09 (JB)