

Hand, foot and mouth disease

Hand, foot and mouth disease is a viral infection usually caused by the coxsackievirus group A. However sometimes it is caused by other viruses such as an echovirus or an enterovirus. Enterovirus 71 (EV71) can cause hand, foot and mouth disease as well as more serious illness, particularly in children.

How hand, foot and mouth disease is spread

The virus can spread from an infected person by:

- > close contact with the fluid in the blisters
- > coughing and sneezing
- > contact with faeces
- > contact with contaminated objects or surfaces.

Signs and symptoms

Symptoms may include:

- > fever
- > tiredness
- > loss of appetite
- > blisters in the mouth and on the hands and feet (see image)
- > a sore mouth for a few days before ulcers or blisters appear.

Affected young children may refuse to eat or drink.



Image courtesy Prof. David Gordon, Flinders Medical Centre, Adelaide, South Australia.

Diagnosis

Diagnosis is usually made when seeing a doctor. Laboratory tests are not usually required.

Incubation period

(time between becoming infected and developing symptoms)

3 to 5 days.

Infectious period

(time during which an infected person can infect others)

The blisters are infectious as long as they contain fluid. The faeces can remain infectious for several weeks.

Treatment

Usually no specific treatment is required. Use of paracetamol for the fever and any discomfort may be indicated. Aspirin should not be given to children under 12 years of age unless specifically recommended by a doctor.

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Prevention

- > [Exclude people with hand, foot and mouth disease from childcare, preschool, school and work](#) until all blisters have dried.
- > Do not deliberately pierce blisters, as the fluid within them is infectious.
- > Allow blisters to dry naturally.
- > Follow good personal hygiene, including hand washing and keeping areas clean.

Useful links

- > [Hand hygiene](#)
- > [Keeping areas clean](#)
- > [Enterovirus 71 \(EV71\) infection](#)
- > [Exclusion periods from childcare, preschool, school and work](#)

You've Got What? 5th Edition

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www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/youvegotwhat

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*SA Health Safety and Quality Community Advisory Group.



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