

HAND-FOOT-MOUTH AND HERPANGINA

Has anyone NOT had this illness?

Hand-foot-mouth is a very common childhood infection featuring mild fever, mouth sores and a rash, often on the hands or feet. (If you get a sore throat but no rash on the hands or feet, then this condition is called "herpangina" but it's the same infection. So, you may hear us use this term as well.)

Hand-foot-mouth is an annoying illness but is not dangerous. This handout will let you know what it is, how you get it, and what can be done about it.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

As mentioned, hand-foot-mouth often causes mild fever, mouth sores and a rash. Some children might have only mouth sores or might be lacking fever or rash. Some children might be so mildly affected that the infection goes unnoticed.

Most children start to feel bad less than a week after they're exposed. They might have poor energy, a mild fever, and a poor appetite. They might complain of a sore throat and turn away from food. After a couple days they develop small blisters and sores most often in the back of their throats, and sometimes on their gums or tongue. A few days later they may develop a rash, with small red spots and sometimes grayish blisters. The spots classically show up on the palms or soles but can be anywhere on the limbs.

The fever usually goes away after the first 2-3 days of illness, and the child's symptoms (including the rash and mouth sores) usually go away in about a week.

HOW DO YOU GET HAND-FOOT-MOUTH?

Hand-foot-mouth is extremely contagious between children - most adults will be immune. It is caused by Coxsackievirus A-16, which lives in many places in the body. When a child is sick with hand-foot-mouth, this virus is very abundant in his saliva, nose discharge, and poop. If any other children are exposed to these substances, they may contract the disease. Even with the strictest cleaning regimens, this disease can spread quickly through daycare. This is why it is very important to make sure your child stays home from daycare and visits our office if he or she has any symptoms of hand-foot-mouth.

HOW IS HAND-FOOT-MOUTH TREATED?

Fever and sore throat can be treated with Tylenol or Motrin. If you're unsure of the dose, please call us for instructions on the proper use of these medicines. We may also recommend a "magic mouthwash" to help with mouth sores. The rash does not require treatment and will go away on its own. As far as the actual infection, this is a viral infection, so there is no way to kill it with antibiotics. The body must use its own immune system to fight off the infection. Generally, the fight lasts about a week, with the child winning every time.

HOW CAN HAND-FOOT-MOUTH BE PREVENTED?

There are three main ways to prevent further hand-foot-mouth infections. First, everyone in the family must observe strict handwashing to keep the virus from spreading from your hands. Second, you need to keep a clean environment by sanitizing diaper changing areas and toys. Third, and most importantly, all children who have any symptoms of hand-foot-mouth disease should stay home until they feel better.

It's difficult to say how long your child will be contagious, but we do know the virus may be shed for several weeks - yes, weeks. However, once the fever is down and no new lesions are showing up, the child is probably less contagious, so it's a good rule of thumb to avoid other children for at least the first 5-7 days of illness.

Once your child has had hand-foot-mouth, it's unlikely he will ever have it as severely again.

WHEN SHOULD I CALL THE OFFICE?

Of course, you can call us any time you have questions or would like to be seen. However, unless your child has a persistent fever, is not drinking or appears to be getting dehydrated, there is no reason to be overly concerned about this illness. If you do have any questions, feel free to call us.