

# Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease

Date:

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Your child may have been exposed to **hand, foot, and mouth disease** while at child care.

## **What causes hand, foot, and mouth disease?**

Hand, foot, and mouth disease is a common illness of infants and children caused by a virus. It occurs mainly in children under 10 years old, but may occur in adults as well. It is most often seen in the summer or fall. It is not related to foot-and-mouth disease in animals and is only transmitted person to person.

## **What are the symptoms of hand, foot, and mouth disease?**

Symptoms of hand, foot, and mouth disease include tiny blisters in the mouth and on the palms of the hands, soles of the feet, and buttocks. The illness may also include fever, sore throat, or cold symptoms. Mouth blisters may make eating or drinking difficult. An infected person may have none, few, or all of the symptoms.

## **How serious is hand, foot, and mouth disease?**

For almost all children the illness is mild. Symptoms are the worst in the first few days but are usually completely gone within a week. Early in the illness some children become dehydrated because of the fever and mouth pain. Only in very rare cases does the virus responsible for hand, foot, and mouth disease cause a severe illness such as viral meningitis or heart problems. Pregnant women and persons with weakened immune systems who are exposed to hand, foot, and mouth disease should contact their health care provider.

## **How does a person get hand, foot, and mouth disease?**

The virus is found in the fluids from the nose, throat, blisters and stool of an infected child. Another child becomes infected when hands, food, or toys contaminated with the virus are put into the mouth.

## **How long does it take to come down with hand, foot, and mouth disease after a person is exposed?**

It usually takes 2-10 days after exposure for symptoms to begin.

## **When is a person with hand, foot, and mouth disease contagious?**

A person is most contagious during the first week of illness, but the virus may be shed in the stool for weeks.

## **How can I help prevent the spread of hand, foot, and mouth disease?**

- Wash hands well and often with soap and water, especially after wiping a nose or changing a diaper.
- Cover coughs and sneezes and put used tissues into a trash can.
- Clean, rinse, and sanitize toys regularly at child care and after contact with saliva.
- Prevent sharing of food, drinks, and personal items that may touch the mouth, such as eating utensils, toothbrushes, or towels.

## **What is the treatment for hand, foot, and mouth disease?**

Relief of any fever or pain is the only treatment available for hand, foot, and mouth disease. To prevent dehydration, those with fever and mouth pain should drink plenty of fluids.

## **If my child develops hand, foot, and mouth disease, must s/he stay away from child care?**

No, as long as s/he does not have any other symptoms that would require exclusion.

