

Hand, foot, and mouth disease

CATEGORY:

Infections / Rashes

LOOKS LIKE:

Rash, pink/red/grey/dark spots, blisters

FEELS LIKE:

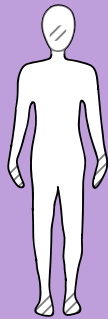
Painful

OUTLOOK:

Contagious; goes away on its own; usual recovery time 7–10 days

LOCATION:

Most commonly mouth, hands, and feet



WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE —



Small oval blisters on the palms, typical of HFMD



Close-up of blisters on the fingers



Blisters on an adult hand



Blisters on the sole of the foot



Small blisters in the mouth and on the lips



HFMD blisters occurring around and inside the mouth

What is it and how do you get it?

Hand, foot, and mouth disease (HFMD) is a common viral infection that mainly affects children under the age of 5 years. It can sometimes affect older children or adults. While it is highly contagious (spreads easily between people), the virus is usually mild and short-lasting.

HFMD is most commonly caused by the Coxsackie A16 virus. It is NOT related to the foot and mouth disease of animals.

HFMD spreads through direct contact with blisters, contaminated surfaces (eg, toys), mucous or saliva (eg, coughing, sneezing), or bowel movements (faeces/stools) through unwashed hands after bathroom use or diaper changes.

Hand, foot, and mouth disease

SYMPTOMS —

HFMD often starts with a **fever**, **sore throat**, or **tiredness**, 3–6 days after being exposed to the infection.

After another 1–2 days, **spots** come up that may **blister**, most often on the **hands** and **feet**, and inside or around the **mouth**. Depending on skin colour, the rash may appear pink, red, grey, brown, purple or darker than the surrounding skin. Sometimes spots or bumps also appear on the arms, buttocks, genital areas, or under the nails. Mouth sores may be painful and can make eating and drinking difficult.

With HFMD, you are **infectious** until the blisters have burst and healed over; usually 7–10 days.

COMPLICATIONS —

Complications are not common, but may include:

- **Dehydration**, as mouth sores can make it too painful to drink
- **Atypical HFMD**: widespread rash, larger blisters, skin peeling, and/or nail shedding
- **Eczema coxsackium**: a type of atypical HFMD that can affect people with eczema
- Rarely, serious **internal infections** (eg, encephalitis or meningitis).

Getting HFMD during pregnancy is unlikely to cause any complications. If you have HFMD shortly before giving birth, there is a small chance your baby could get it too.

DIAGNOSIS —

HFMD is usually diagnosed by a healthcare professional based on how the rash and blisters look, and their typical location. If the diagnosis is unclear, swabs or stool samples may be sent to check for the virus. For severe dehydration or other rare complications, hospital care may be needed.

TREATMENT AND PREVENTION —

There are no vaccines or antiviral medications to prevent or cure HFMD. The disease goes away on its own. While infected, the aim is to manage symptoms and reduce spread to others.

Pain relief:

- Simple pain relief (eg, paracetamol)
- Mouthwashes/ointments to soothe blisters.

Hydration:

- Try and keep up a good fluid intake
- Children who are unable to eat or drink may need intravenous (IV) fluids in hospital.

Blister care:

- Leave blisters to dry naturally without popping
- Keep clean and covered with dressings, especially if around other people.

Hygiene:

- Wash hands often and thoroughly with soap
- Avoid sharing personal items such as towels, drinking cups, and toys.

CHILDCARE AND SCHOOL —

Keep children home from childcare centres or school until they are feeling well and until all the blisters have healed and are no longer infectious. However, the virus can still be found in faeces for up to a month, well after the skin has gone back to normal. Because of this, ongoing hand hygiene remains important to stop HFMD from spreading.

OUTCOME —

HFMD is usually a mild illness. Most people make a full recovery within 7–10 days, and blisters typically heal without scarring. See a doctor if other symptoms develop such as shortness of breath, bad headaches, muscle weakness, or if it is too painful to eat or drink.

The first infection usually gives some immune protection against the virus, but it is possible to get HFMD more than once.



MORE INFORMATION —
<https://dermnetnz.org/topics/hand-foot-and-mouth-disease>



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