

# Hand, Foot, and Mouth Disease

*This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC – safer, healthier people.*

Sometimes the name of an illness can be scarier than the illness itself. And one childhood illness—hand, foot, and mouth disease—is a name that can really push those anxiety buttons.

I'm Dr. Adam Cohen. As both a parent and a physician, I've found that getting all the facts about an issue can lower anxiety and boost confidence when it comes to caring for your child.

In today's podcast, we'll explore the symptoms of hand, foot, and mouth disease and how to make your child more comfortable if he or she has the illness. We'll also review some practical prevention tips. Okay... time to get down to basics.

Hand, foot, and mouth disease is a viral illness that's contagious. It mainly affects children under three years of age, although older children and adults can get it too. In the United States, hand, foot, and mouth disease usually occurs in the summer and early fall and lasts from 7 to 10 days.

The name tends to be confused with foot and mouth disease—an illness that affects animals. But that disease, which is sometimes called hoof and mouth disease, has absolutely nothing to do with hand, foot, and mouth disease.

If your child comes down with hand, foot, and mouth disease, he may be a bit feverish at first and act fussy in general. You may notice that his appetite is off as well. A day or two after the fever begins, sores may develop on his tongue or gums or on the inside of his cheeks. These can be painful, so he may refuse to eat or drink anything. A rash might appear on the palms of his hands, soles of his feet, and buttocks. The rash, which isn't itchy, starts out as small, flat, red dots that may turn into bumps or blisters. Some people with hand, foot, and mouth disease may just have the rash; others may only have mouth sores. And some infected people, including most adults, have no symptoms at all.

In the early stages of the illness, it can be easy to confuse hand, foot, and mouth disease with strep throat or even chickenpox. A visit to your child's doctor is the best way to clear up any confusion and to get answers to any questions or concerns.

There's no vaccine available for hand, foot, and mouth disease. And since it's a viral rather than a bacterial disease, antibiotics are not an effective treatment. If your child has a mild case of hand, foot, and mouth disease, all you may have to do is keep him comfortable with the proper dose of acetaminophen or ibuprofen, based on your doctor's recommendation. Remember, you should never give a child aspirin unless recommended by his doctor. Give him plenty of fluids and make sure dehydration isn't becoming a problem.

Hand, foot, and mouth disease is spread by direct contact with infectious virus. A cough or sneeze from an infected person, direct contact with fluid from the blisters, and unwashed hands after changing diapers or using the bathroom are all ways to spread the virus.

The following prevention tips will help keep hand, foot, and mouth disease from spreading:

- Make sure your whole family remembers to cover coughs when ill
- Wash your hands often, especially after diaper changes
- Avoid sharing eating or drinking utensils with an infected person
- Use soap and water to clean surfaces—like door knobs or toys—that may be contaminated with the virus. Then, disinfect with a solution of one tablespoon of bleach to four cups of water.
- Avoid close contact—like kissing or hugging—with an infected person

For more information about hand, foot, and mouth disease, please visit [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) and type “HFMD” in the search box.

*For the most accurate health information, visit [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.*