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Health Department

FACTS & details

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## Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease (HFMD)

### What is hand, foot and mouth disease?

Hand, foot and mouth disease (HFMD) is a common viral illness which usually affects infants and children younger than five years old.

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

HFMD begins with a mild fever, poor appetite, sore throat and a general "sick" feeling. One or two days after the fever begins, painful sores develop in the mouth. They begin as small red spots that blister. The blisters are usually located on the tongue, gums, and inside of the cheeks. The skin rash develops over one to two days with flat or raised red spots, some with blisters. The rash does not itch, and it is usually located on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet. It may also appear on the buttocks. A person with HFMD may have only the skin rash or the mouth ulcers.

### How soon do symptoms appear after infection occurs?

The usual period from infection to onset of symptoms ("incubation period") is three to seven days. Fever is often the first symptom of HFMD.

### How long is someone contagious after infection occurs?

A person is most contagious during the first week of the illness. People can sometimes be contagious for days or weeks after symptoms go away.

### How is hand, foot, and mouth disease spread?

Infection is spread person to person by direct contact with nose and throat discharges, saliva, fluid from blisters, or the stool of infected persons. HFMD is not transmitted to or from pets or other animals.

### How can you prevent hand, foot and mouth disease?

Specific prevention for HFMD is not available, but the risk of infection can be lowered through good hygienic practices. Preventive measures include:

- Frequent hand washing, especially after changing diapers.
- Cleaning contaminated surfaces and soiled items with soap and water and then with a diluted solution of chlorine. This solution is made by mixing approximately ¼ cup of bleach with one gallon of water.
- Avoiding close contact (kissing, hugging, sharing utensils, etc.) with children with HFMD.

### For More Information:

Contact the Sedgwick County  
Health Department Epidemiology Office at  
316-660-7392 or visit the Sedgwick County  
website at  
[www.sedgwickcounty.org](http://www.sedgwickcounty.org).