Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease (Enteroviral vesicular stomatitis exanthem)

What is Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease?
Hand, foot, and mouth disease (HFMD) is a common viral illness of infants and children. It is characterized by fever, sores in the mouth, and a skin rash. It is not related to the foot-and-mouth disease that affects cattle.

- HFMD begins with a mild fever, poor appetite, malaise (feeling unwell), and often a sore throat.
- One or two days after the fever begins, painful sores develop in the mouth. They begin as small red spots that blister and then often become ulcers (on gums, tongue, and inside cheeks).
- The skin rash develops over 1-2 days, with flat or raised red spots, sometimes with blisters; and may last for 7-10 days. The rash does not itch and is usually on the palms of hands and soles of feet (but may appear on buttocks).
- Most cases occur in summer and fall.

Is Hand, Foot, and Mouth Disease contagious?
Yes, HFMD is moderately contagious. Infection is spread from person-to-person by direct contact with nose and throat discharges, saliva, fluid from blisters, or the stool of an infected person.

A person with HFMD can transmit the virus for several weeks after the onset of infection.

Who is at risk for Hand, Foot, and Mouth Disease?
HFMD occurs mainly in children under 10 years old, but it can occur in adults too. Everyone is at risk of infection with viruses that cause HFMD, but not everyone who is infected becomes ill.

Infants, children, and adolescents are more likely to be susceptible to infection and illness from these viruses because they are less likely than adults to be immune to them.

How is hand, foot, and mouth disease diagnosed?
HFMD is one of many infections that result in mouth sores. Usually, the physician can distinguish between HFMD and other causes of mouth sores based on the age of the patient, the pattern of symptoms reported by the patient or parent, and the appearance of the rash and sores on examination.

A throat swab specimen or stool specimen may be sent to a laboratory. However, since the testing often takes 2 to 4 weeks to obtain a final answer, the physician usually does not order these tests.

How is hand, foot, and mouth disease treated?
No specific treatment is available. Symptomatic treatment is given to provide relief from fever, aches, or pain from the mouth ulcers.

Can hand, foot, and mouth disease be prevented?
The risk of infection can be lowered by following good hygiene practices. Preventive measures include:

- Washing hands frequently and correctly, especially after going to the bathroom, changing diapers and/or handling diapers or other stool-soiled material.
- Covering the mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing.
- Cleaning dirty surfaces, first with soap and water and then a disinfectant.
- Washing toys and other surfaces that may have saliva on them.
- Avoiding close contact (kissing, hugging, sharing eating utensils).
- Excluding symptomatic children from child care or school settings until determined non-contagious.

For further information visit:

Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)