

Hand, foot and mouth disease

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Hand, foot and mouth disease (HFMD) is a common infectious disease caused by several different viruses and found worldwide. It is not related to foot and mouth disease, which is found in cattle, pigs and sheep. It is spread person to person through direct contact with infected body fluid (e.g. coughs, sneezes, saliva, fluid from blisters/mouth ulcers and faeces) and indirect contact with contaminated surfaces.

HFMD usually affects children, but adolescents and adults can also catch it. Symptoms include fever, mouth ulcers and a spotty rash with blisters on the hands and feet. It is usually a mild, self-limiting infection, but a more serious illness, causing meningitis, encephalitis and paralysis, can occasionally occur. If mouth ulcers are very painful, swallowing may be difficult and dehydration may occur.

There is no specific treatment for HFMD. Rest, fluids and pain relief help relieve symptoms. Medical attention is needed for dehydration in young children and other vulnerable travellers. Urgent medical attention should also be sought for other symptoms such as confusion or seizures. As HFMD is caused by several different viruses, antibiotics do not help and it is possible to catch it more than once. Most people develop immunity as they get older.

Prevention

There is no vaccine currently available in the UK that protects against the viruses that cause HFMD. Vaccines are available in other regions of the world. They prevent some but not all of the viruses that are thought to cause HFMD.

Travellers can lower their risk of infection by:

- Avoiding close contact, such as kissing, hugging, sharing cutlery, plates and cups/glasses, with anyone infected with HFMD or who has symptoms.
- Careful hand washing, especially after using the toilet and changing nappies.
- Cleaning and disinfecting any surfaces and items (including toys) touched by an infected person.

Resources

- [NHS: Hand, foot and mouth disease](#)
- [NICE: Management of hand, foot and mouth disease](#)
- [US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Hand, foot, and mouth disease \(HFMD\)](#)