Hand, Foot, & Mouth Disease

Hand, foot, and mouth disease (HFMD) is a common viral illness of infants and children. It occurs mainly in children under 10 years old, but adults may also be at risk. Ulcers (open sores) occur in the mouth and then the child may develop a rash on the hands and feet, and occasionally the buttocks.

CAUSES

It is usually caused by a group of viruses called enteroviruses. Most people are better in one week. HFMD is somewhat passable to others (*contagious*). Infection is spread from person to person by direct contact with infected persons:

- Nose discharges.
- Throat discharges.
- Stool.
- A person is most contagious during the first week of the illness. HFMD is not transmitted to or from pets or other animals. It is most common in the summer and early fall.

SYMPTOMS

- Fever.
- Aches.
- Pain from the mouth ulcers.

DIAGNOSIS

- HFMD is just one of many infections that cause mouth sores. Another common cause is oral herpes virus infection. Oral herpes produces an *inflammation* (swelling and soreness) of the mouth and gums (sometimes called *stomatitis*).
- HFMD is a different disease than foot-and-mouth disease of cattle, sheep, and swine. Although the names are similar, the two diseases are not related at all. Different viruses cause foot-and-mouth disease of cattle, sheep, and swine.

TREATMENT

- No specific treatment is available for this enterovirus infection. Treatment is given to provide relief from the symptoms. You or your child should only take over-the-counter or prescription medicines for pain, discomfort, or fever as directed by your caregiver.

PROGNOSIS

Commonly, HFMD is a mild disease. Nearly all patients recover without medical treatment in 7 to 10 days. There are no common complications. Rarely, this illness may be associated with "aseptic" or viral meningitis. With viral meningitis, the patient has:

- Fever.
- Headache.
- Stiff neck.
- Back pain.

They may need to be hospitalized for a few days.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- These sores typically hurt and are painful when exposed to salty, spicy or acidic food or drinks such as orange juice or lemonade. Milk seems to be soothing for some patients. Often a child with HFMD will be able to drink without discomfort. Try many combinations of foods to see what your child may tolerate and aim for a balanced diet. Sport electrolyte drinks such as Gatorade and Powerade are good choices for hydration and they also provide a few calories.
- Preventing spread of the infection:
  - Frequent hand-washing, especially after diaper changes.
  - Disinfection of contaminated surfaces by household cleaners (such as diluted bleach solution made by

mixing 1 capful of household bleach containing chlorine with 1 gallon water).
- Washing soiled articles of clothing.
- Children are often kept out of childcare programs, schools, or other group settings during the first few days of the illness. These actions may reduce the spread of infection.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL ATTENTION IF:

- Your caregiver should be consulted immediately or you should return to the emergency room if your baby or child develops signs of dehydration:
  - Decreased urination.
  - Dry mouth, tongue or lips.
  - Decreased tears or sunken eyes.
  - Dry skin.
  - Breathing fast.
  - Fussy or floppy.
  - Poor color- pale.
  - Prolonged capillary refill (time it takes the fingertip to turn pink again after a gentle squeeze; abnormal is greater than 2 seconds).
  - Rapid weight loss.
- Your child does not have adequate pain relief.
- Your child develops a severe headache, stiff neck, or change in behavior.

Most of this information courtesy of the Respiratory and Enteric Viruses Branch, National Center for Infectious Diseases. For further information contact this organization at 404-639-3607.

Document Released: 09/15/2004 Document Re-Released: 10/15/2010
ExitCare® Patient Information ©2011 ExitCare, LLC.