



Diseases Fact Sheet - Hand, Foot & Mouth Disease

South Dakota Department of Health

Office of Disease Prevention Services - 605-773-3737 -(1-800-592-1861 in South Dakota only)

This material is provided for informational purposes only and is not a substitute for medical care. We are not able to answer personal medical questions. Please see your health care provider concerning appropriate care, treatment or other medical advice.

What is it?

Hand, Foot, & Mouth Disease is a viral illness caused by several different viruses from the enterovirus group that inhabit the human intestinal tract. Man is the only known source for this illness. Foot and Mouth disease of cattle, sheep and swine is not communicable to man. Another virus of domestic animals (called ORF virus) is communicable to man, but causes lesions only on the skin.

Who gets Hand, Foot, & Mouth Disease?

Anyone can get Hand, Foot, & Mouth disease. Man is the only known source for these viruses. Because there are several different viruses that cause the same syndrome, seemingly, a person can get the illness more than once.

How is this virus spread?

By direct contact with nose and throat discharges and feces of infected persons. Virus is also present in the blister-like lesions.

What are the symptoms of Hand, Foot, & Mouth Disease?

Some persons experience sudden onset of fever and sore throat along with small, discrete grayish-white lesions ("sores"). These lesions may be present on any of the soft tissue inside the mouth. Some persons experience lesions that are raised and/or blister-like on the body, most notably the palms, fingers and the soles of the feet. These lesions may persist for 7-10 days.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

Usually lesions appear 3-5 days after exposure.

For how long can an infected person carry this virus?

A person can be considered infectious during the time symptoms are present. These viruses inhabit the human intestinal tract and may persist in stool for several weeks, even after symptoms disappear.



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How is it diagnosed?

Diagnosis is based mainly on clinical symptoms. Virus may be isolated from lesions, nasopharyngeal or stool specimens. Since many viruses may produce the same syndrome, these tests are not routinely done.

What is the treatment for Hand, Foot, & Mouth Disease?

There is no specific treatment. Viral illnesses in general are self-limiting, meaning, you will get over the illness without outside influence. There are some medications available to temporarily ease the discomfort from the lesions. Complications are rare and there are no fatalities associated with this disease.

What precautions should the infected person follow?

Reduce person-to-person contact where practicable, such as avoiding crowded gatherings or poorly ventilated areas. Good personal hygiene is important in preventing spread - especially hand-washing after passing stool, contact with nose and throat discharges or articles soiled therewith.