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## **HAND, FOOT & MOUTH DISEASE**

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### **What is it?**

Hand, foot and mouth disease is an infection caused by a virus (coxsackievirus). The infection can occur at any age but is most likely to affect children under 10. Outbreaks may occur among groups of children especially in daycare centres or nursery schools. Hand, foot and mouth disease usually occurs in the summer and early fall.

### **What are the symptoms?**

Hand, foot and mouth disease is usually not severe. It may cause a fever, headache, sore throat, loss of appetite, and lack of energy. It is characterized by small, painful ulcers in the mouth, on the inner cheeks, gums, and the sides of the tongue, as well as a skin rash on the hands and feet. The rash consists of red spots often topped by small blisters occurring mainly on the palms and fingers of the hands and on the soles of the feet.

### **How is it spread?**

The virus is spread in the faeces (stool) and by direct contact with nose and throat discharges of infected people. Saliva on hands or toys can also spread the virus from person to person. The virus can be shed for several weeks after the onset of infection but is most contagious 7-10 days after becoming infected.

### **What is the incubation period?**

It may take 3-5 days to show symptoms after being in contact with someone who has it.

### **How is it treated?**

There is no treatment for hand, foot and mouth disease and because it is caused by a virus, antibiotics do not cure the infection. Your child may continue to attend childcare or school if they are feeling well enough to take part in daily activities.

### **What precautions can I take?**

- Wash hands well, especially after going to the bathroom, changing or handling diapers or other stool soiled material.
- Promote good hand washing after wiping noses and before preparing food.
- Children should be encouraged to cover their mouth when coughing or sneezing.
- Children need to be taught to wash their hands after going to the bathroom and before eating.
- Wash toys and other surfaces that may have been in an infected child's mouth.

For more information please call Public Health at 376-9420 or 1-800-263-3456.