

Hand, foot and mouth



Hand, foot and mouth disease is a common childhood illness that can also affect adults. It usually gets better on its own in 7 to 10 days.

Hand, foot and mouth disease is easily passed on to other people. It's spread in coughs, sneezes, poo and the fluid in the blisters. You can get it more than once.

You can start spreading hand, foot and mouth from a few days before you have any symptoms. You are most likely to spread it to others in the first 5 days after symptoms start.

Although there's usually no risk to the pregnancy or baby, it's best to avoid close contact with anyone who has hand, foot and mouth disease. This is because getting hand, foot and mouth disease shortly before giving birth can mean your baby is born with a mild version of it. Speak to a GP or your midwife if you have been in contact with someone with hand, foot and mouth disease.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

The 1st symptoms of hand, foot and mouth disease can be:

- a sore throat
- a high temperature
- not wanting to eat

The 2nd stage usually starts a few days later and symptoms can include:

- [mouth ulcers](#), which can be painful
- a raised rash of spots on the hands and feet, and sometimes the groin area and bottom



The rash of spots can look pink, red, or darker than the surrounding skin, depending on your skin tone. The spots can turn into blisters, which might be grey or lighter than surrounding skin and can be painful. Symptoms are usually mild and are the same in adults and children.

IF YOUR CHILD HAS A VERY HIGH TEMPERATURE, FEELS HOT AND IS SHIVERY, IF YOU ARE WORRIED ABOUT THE SYMPTOMS OR IF THE CHILD IS URINATING LESS THAN USUAL ASK FOR AN URGENT GP APPOINTMENT OR CALL 111 FOR FURTHER ADVICE.

TREATMENT

Hand, foot and mouth disease usually gets better on its own in 7 to 10 days. You cannot take antibiotics or other medicines to cure hand, foot and mouth but you can help the symptoms by:

- drinking cool fluids to soothe the mouth and prevent dehydration (avoid acidic drinks, such as fruit juice)
- eating soft foods like yoghurt
- avoiding hot, salty and spicy foods
- taking [paracetamol](#) or [ibuprofen](#) to help ease a sore mouth or throat

If you need further support you can ask a pharmacist for advice about treatments, such as mouth ulcer gels, sprays and mouthwashes, to relieve pain. They can also tell you which ones are suitable for children.

STOP THE SPREAD

To reduce the risk of spreading hand, foot and mouth disease:

- wash your hands often with soap and water, and children's hands too
- use tissues to trap germs when you cough or sneeze
- bin used tissues as quickly as possible
- do not share towels or household items like cups or cutlery

wash soiled bedding and clothing on a hot wash

Keep your child off school or nursery while they're feeling too unwell to go. As soon as they're feeling better, they can go back to school or nursery. There's no need to wait until all the blisters have healed. Keeping your child away from other children for longer is unlikely to stop the illness spreading.

5 THINGS YOU MAY NOT KNOW

1. HAND FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE IS NOT THE SAME AS FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE.

Hand foot and mouth disease is caused by a group of viruses called the coxsackieviruses which affects humans, most commonly children under 10 years of age. In comparison, foot and mouth disease is caused by several serotypes of the aphthovirus and only affects cloven-hoofed animals such as cattle, sheep and pigs. Although the two are both viral illnesses, they differ in host, symptoms, transmissibility, prevalence and treatment.

2. CHILDREN AND ADULTS WITH HAND, FOOT AND MOUTH CAN ATTEND SCHOOL

In the vast majority of cases, hand, foot and mouth disease is a mild illness and there is no need to keep children from school once they are well enough to attend. As the virus sheds through faecal stools meaning these remain infective for up to a month after the illness it is impractical to keep children who are well away from school.

3. HANDWASHING IS THE BEST PROTECTION AGAINST HAND, FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE.

Washing your hands with warm water and liquid soap is one of the easiest and most effective ways to protect yourself and others from illnesses such as hand, foot and mouth disease. This is because washing your hands properly removes dirt, viruses and bacteria to stop them spreading to other people and objects. If an individual has hand, foot and mouth, all individuals within the household should wash their hands well and often, especially:

- after using the toilet or changing a nappy
- before and after handling raw foods like meat and vegetables
- before eating or handling food
- after blowing your nose, sneezing or coughing
- before and after treating a cut or wound
- after touching animals, including pets, their food and after cleaning their cages.

Other preventative measures include frequently cleaning shared surfaces and toys with disinfectant and minimising sharing personal items such as cutlery, drinking cups, towels, toothbrushes, and clothing.

4. ANYONE CAN CATCH HAND, FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE.

Although infants and children younger than 5 years old are most often affected, adults can also catch hand, foot and mouth disease, and they can catch the disease more than once. This is because hand, foot and mouth disease is caused by several different viruses.

5. THERE IS A RISK OF DEHYDRATION ASSOCIATED WITH HAND, FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE.

One symptom of hand, foot and mouth disease is small, oval, white blisters on the palms, soles of the feet, and in the mouth. These blisters may be painful and your child may have a sore mouth and throat, leading to poor appetite or risk of dehydration.

The best treatment for mild dehydration is to give your child more fluid to drink. Parents of breastfed or formula fed children are advised to continue feeding small amounts more often than usual. Babies on formula or solid foods can be given small sips of extra water to avoid dehydration. Older children who are dehydrated should be given at least 250ml of water (or oral rehydration solution) to drink every hour for 4 hours. Pharmacists can advise on a suitable rehydration solution to replace lost fluids. Smaller children will need less to drink than older children.

IF YOUR BABY IS UNDER 6 MONTHS, ALWAYS SEE A DOCTOR IF YOU BELIEVE THEY ARE DEHYDRATED.

FURTHER INFORMATION

[Hand, foot and mouth disease - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk)

[Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease \(Causes, Symptoms, Treatment, Prevention\) \(patient.info\)](https://patient.info)

[Managing specific infectious diseases: A to Z - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

[How to wash your hands - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk)

[Dehydration - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk)