

## **Hand, Foot, and Mouth Disease**

### **What is Hand, Foot, and Mouth Disease (HFM)?**

Hand, Foot, and Mouth Disease is a common, contagious childhood illness that is caused by a viral infection. It usually affects children under 5 years old, but can also affect older children and adults.

### **What are the signs and symptoms of HFM?**

The infection usually starts with fever, a sore throat, and congestion. Then a rash will appear. The rash classically involves little blisters anywhere in the mouth. The rash can also be found on the palms of hands, soles of feet, fingers, or buttocks. Symptoms are worse in the first few days and usually resolve by one week. There may be some skin peeling for 1-2 weeks after the rash resolves.

### **What is the treatment for HFM?**

There is not a medicine to treat HFM. Antibiotics do not help because it is a viral infection. Management involves treating the fever and pain with medications like acetaminophen and ibuprofen. There are also some options for easing the discomfort of the mouth ulcers. It is most important to avoid dehydration by drinking plenty of fluids; small frequent sips are often tolerated best. If the fever is high and persistent or there are signs of dehydration, the individual needs to be evaluated by a medical professional.

### **How is the virus spread?**

The virus that causes HFM can be spread by respiratory droplets or through the fecal-oral route. Things to help prevent spread include: frequent hand washing, covering nose/mouth during coughing or sneezing, cleaning shared toys, avoiding food sharing, and disinfecting surfaces.

### **When can a child return to school after being diagnosed with HFM?**

For a child to return to school, the child should: be fever-free for 24 hours, be able to eat and drink enough to stay hydrated, be able to participate in class, not have excessive drooling, and not have many open blisters.