

## Hand, foot and mouth disease outbreak questions answered by Loyola pediatric infectious disease specialist

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(Medical Xpress) -- A mysterious disease that has [killed nearly 60 children in Cambodia](#) has been identified by the World Health Organization as enterovirus 71. This virus is one among a family of viruses that causes a variety of illnesses, including a common childhood illness called hand, foot and mouth disease. However, Andrew Bonwit, MD, pediatric infectious disease specialist at Loyola University Health System, said a fatal outcome from such illness is rare.

“Hand, [foot and mouth disease](#) can be caused by enterovirus 71, but also by a number of other [viruses](#) from the larger family of enteroviruses. Polio, for instance, is from this group as well, but we don’t see cases of the illness in the United States anymore, thanks to vaccination. Most children who develop hand, foot and mouth disease require little medical attention. It’s a virus that just needs to run its course,” Bonwit said.

Bonwit said he has heard of mild cases in clinics in the Chicago area, but that is to be expected.

According to Bonwit, symptoms of hand, foot and mouth disease include:

- Fever
- Sore throat and fatigue
- Sores inside the mouth and on the tongue, and often on the hands, feet

and sometimes on the buttocks

- Lack of appetite
- Unwillingness to drink fluids

If a child is showing these symptoms, Bonwit suggested calling the child's physician to see if the child should be evaluated in person.

“The sores in the mouth can be extremely painful, which makes it difficult for a child to eat and drink. If a child refuses to drink, he or she should be examined by a physician and may need IV fluids to keep from becoming dehydrated,” Bonwit said.

The disease usually affects children younger than 10 years of age since they have a weaker immune system. It can take about 7-10 days to run its course and is extremely contagious.

He said parents should seek additional medical attention if a child has:

- Trouble breathing
- Won't drink any fluids and is showing signs of dehydration
- Difficulty staying awake, even for short period of time such as at meals

“There isn't a specific vaccine for this virus. The best protection we have for children is good hand-washing hygiene, and also not sending a child with this [illness](#) to school, day care or camp. It also reminds us how important it is to vaccinate our children against the illnesses that we can protect them against,” Bonwit said. “When we hear about a scare like this, it's always a good reminder for parents about the importance of vaccinating. It also helps your doctor simplify the evaluation of your child.”

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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