

What you need to know about hand, foot and mouth disease

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A recent outbreak of hand, foot and mouth disease among college students in Florida has surprised many people, since it typically affects small children. However, a Baylor College of Medicine expert says anyone – even adults – can get the disease and that it's most common at this time of year.

Dr. Gail Harrison, professor of [pediatrics](#) at Baylor and Texas Children's Hospital and an expert on [infectious diseases](#), offers more information on hand, [foot](#) and mouth disease in this Q&A:

What is hand foot and mouth disease?

Hand, foot and mouth disease (HFMD) is a viral infection, caused by a class of viruses called enteroviruses. It is common, and most often seen in late summer and early fall. It is worldwide, and it can cause outbreaks. It is most commonly seen in young children but anyone, including adults, can get hand foot and mouth disease.

How does it spread?

Hand foot and mouth disease spreads by contact with another person with the disease. It is found in body secretions such as nose mucus, saliva and bowel movement feces.

What are the symptoms of hand foot and mouth

disease?

It causes sores to form in the mouth and also on the hands and feet – on the palms of hands and soles of feet. Infants may also have the rash on their buttocks. It may cause fever, pain in the mouth or throat and discomfort. Dehydration is possible if the pain in the mouth sores is severe.

It is almost always a self-limited illness and usually goes away in three to five days, almost always within a week. Rarely, can it cause severe problems with the heart or brain. These people will need to be hospitalized for treatment.

Is there a specific test for hand foot and mouth disease?

A specific lab test is usually not necessary. Doctors can usually diagnose the disease through a history and physical examination.

Is there treatment for hand foot and mouth disease?

The treatment for hand food and mouth disease is treatment of symptoms. Fever and discomfort may be treated with acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil or Motrin). Keep hydrated with plenty of water and cool liquids, popsicles, or ice cream or soft foods like pudding.

Is there a vaccine for hand foot and mouth disease?

There is no vaccine to prevent the disease. The disease can be prevented or the risk reduced by careful [hand](#) washing and avoiding close contact with others who have the disease.

Provided by Baylor College of Medicine

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