

Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease: A guide for parents

Dear Parent,

As you may be aware, hand, foot and mouth disease is a common problem among young school-going children. The Healthspring team has put together useful information, including common questions that you may have and also some easy steps for you to take, to protect your child.

Please go through it and call us, or write to us, in case there are any further questions or if you require further information. Please also reach out to us if your child shows any symptoms. You can call 6130-3535 and ask to speak to me or any of the other physicians, or reach Shivani Dawlatjada at shivani.dawlatjada@healthspring.in or on 98330-08636.

What is Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease (HFMD)? How do you know if your child is infected?

Hand, foot, and mouth disease (HFMD) is a common viral illness that affects children less than 5 years old. It can however, also affect older children and adults. HFMD occurs most often during the summer.

Initial symptoms of HFMD include a mild fever (101-102 °F) and malaise, followed by a characteristic rash within one or two days.

Small red spots (2-3 mm in diameter) that quickly develop into small blisters (vesicles) appear on the palms, soles, and oral cavity. The gums, tongue, and inner cheek are most commonly involved in the mouth. The foot lesions may also involve the lower calf region and rarely may appear on the buttocks. Oral lesions are commonly associated with a sore throat, difficulty eating and diminished appetite.

How do children typically contract HFMD?

HFMD spreads from an infected person to others through:

- close contact, such as kissing hugging, or sharing cups and eating utensils
- coughing and sneezing
- contact with faeces, for example when changing a diaper
- contact with blister fluid
- touching objects or surfaces that have the virus on them

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When someone gets HFMD, they develop immunity to the specific virus that caused their infection. However, because HFMD is caused by several different viruses, people can get the disease again.

What should you do if your child contracts HFMD?

If your child has HFMD, help to minimise the spread of HFMD to others by:

- Informing Oberoi International School immediately, so they can monitor other children closely and take additional precautions
- Keeping your child at home and away from public places
- Ensuring that your child has no more symptoms of HFMD before your child returns to school
- Looking out for signs and symptoms in other family members
- Having good hygiene practices such as
 - Frequent and proper handwashing e.g. after going to the toilet and before eating
 - Covering the mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing
 - Not sharing food/drinks, eating utensils, toothbrushes or towels with others
 - Proper disinfection of articles such as toys or appliances contaminated by nasal or oral secretions

When is your child ready to go back to school?

Conduct these four checks to ensure that your child is fit to return to school:

1. Check for fever
2. Check for blisters on hands and arms
3. Check for mouth ulcers
4. Check for blisters on soles of feet, legs and/or buttocks

How do I manage my child's care if he/she contracts HFMD?

There is neither an effective antiviral therapy nor an effective vaccine available against HFMD. It is a contagious disease and has the potential to spread very fast over a large population. Before giving your child any medication, consult your doctor or call me at 6130-3535. HFMD treatment usually consists of:

- Ensuring that your child has an adequate fluid intake to prevent dehydration. Cold liquids are generally preferable.
- Spicy or acidic substances may cause discomfort.
- Fever may be treated with antipyretics.

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- Pain may be treated with standard doses of acetaminophen or ibuprofen.
- Direct analgesia may also be applied to the oral cavity via mouthwashes or sprays.

Is HFMD serious enough that my child will need to be taken to the hospital?

Most children with HFMD are relatively well and active despite their illness. However, you should reach out to your doctor or take your child to the hospital if you notice any of the following:

- when the oral intake of fluids is poor, or when the child is unable to swallow, or vomits persistently
- when the tongue is dry, or when the child has decreased urine output (dehydration)
- if the child appears lethargic, drowsy or irritable, is crying persistently, or is disoriented
- if seizures occur
- if there is difficulty in breathing
- if the child looks ashen, pale or blue
- if the child complains of acute headache or giddiness, or if there is neck stiffness

We hope this answers your questions, and feel assured that Oberoi International School and Healthspring are vigilant, and will help keep your child healthy. Please do feel free to reach out to us if you have any more questions.

Dr. Khullar
Paediatrician, Healthspring

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