



Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

Henderson County, NC

Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease

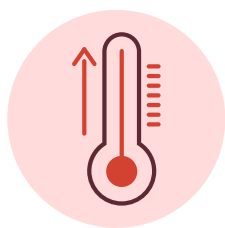
What You Should Know

What is Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease?

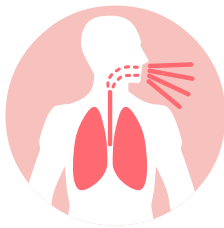
Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease (HFMD) is a common illness caused by a virus. It usually affects infants and young children under 7 years old, but older children and adults can get it too. It spreads easily, especially in childcare settings.

HFMD often starts with a fever, sore throat, or tired feeling, followed by the appearance of tiny red spots or blisters on the hands, feet, and inside the mouth. The illness is usually not serious, but it is very contagious. Because it spreads easily in settings like daycares and schools, good hygiene is important to prevent it from passing to others.

Signs and Symptoms



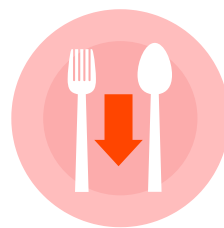
Fever



**Cough or
Sore Throat**



**Feeling Tired
or Unwell**



**Reduced
Appetite**



After 1-2 days:

Small red spots or blisters may appear:

- Inside the mouth (tongue, gums, or inner cheeks)
- On the hands and feet
- On knees, elbows, buttocks, or the genital area

The mouth sores can make it hurt to eat or drink.

How it Spreads

The virus spreads through:

- Coughs and sneezes (tiny droplets from the nose or mouth)
- Touching blisters or saliva
- Contact with stool when changing diapers

The virus can live on surfaces (like toys or tables) for several days. Children are most contagious during the first week, but the virus can stay in stool for up to 8 weeks.

Prevention

- Wash hands often, especially after changing diapers or wiping noses.
- Clean toys and surfaces with a bleach-water mix (1 tbsp bleach in 4 cups water)
- Avoid close contact (kissing, hugging, sharing utensils) with anyone sick.

Treatment

There's no specific medicine or vaccine, but you can help the child feel better.

- Give acetaminophen or ibuprofen for fever or pain; never give aspirin.
- Offer cool drinks and soft foods.
- Keep blisters clean and uncovered. Don't pop them.

When It's Safe to Return to Childcare or School

Most children can go back to childcare or school when:

- They have been fever-free for at least 24 hours (without fever medicine).
- They feel well enough to take part in normal activities.
- Any blisters are dry or scabbed over (they do not need to be completely gone).

Diagnosis, Testing and Reporting

Most of the time, a doctor or nurse can tell it's Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease just by looking at the rash and mouth sores. **Lab tests are not usually needed**, unless symptoms are unusual or very severe.

HFMD is common and not required to be reported to the health department in most cases. However, **childcare centers should let parents and staff know** if there are several children out with similar symptoms so everyone can watch for signs of illness.



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Henderson County Department of Public Health



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