

# Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease

With school going back after the holidays, beware of hand, foot and mouth disease writes Dr Rebecca Overton.

**H**and, Foot and Mouth (HFM) is a contagious, viral illness typically seen in young children. The viruses which cause the symptoms are Enteroviruses, such as Coxsackie virus.

It can be transmitted from person to person via the respiratory (coughing and sneezing) and faecal-oral (saliva or unwashed hands after changing nappies) routes, or via fluid from the blisters in the mouth or on the palms and soles.

The incubation period is two to five days and the child is infectious throughout the duration of the illness.

Typically infants and young children are affected by this infection. The majority of infections are asymptomatic or mild in nature and the child recovers in seven to ten days.

When children are infected they may present with fever, runny nose, sore throat and mouth, ulcers in the mouth and a rash with small red blisters on the palms, soles, nappy area and in the mouth.

If the child has a lot of blisters and inflammation in their mouth, they may present with drooling of saliva and a refusal to eat or drink as their mouth is painful. Symptoms can be managed with paracetamol and ibuprofen (Nurofen) for pain and fever and frequent sips of fluids to avoid dehydration.

When the child has symptoms they are infectious and should remain at home until the child is well and all the blisters have dried up, which may take up to a week from the onset of the illness. The child should not return to school or day care until he or she has fully recovered. Whilst unwell, the child should avoid contact with other children and should avoid public places.

To avoid other family members contracting the illness, good hand washing is essential. Toys, eating utensils and towels used by infected family members should not be shared with others and should be washed carefully with a diluted bleach solution. Other members of the family should be reviewed each morning for signs of HFM before they go to school or preschool.

Infected children should be encouraged to cover their mouth and nose when coughing and sneezing. They should wash their hands before eating and after going to the toilet.

The disease usually resolves without any specific treatment over seven to ten days, however complications such as meningitis (inflammation of the lining outside the brain and spinal cord), encephalitis (inflammation of the brain), myocarditis (inflammation of the heart muscle) and pneumonia may occur and are more likely in children under five years of age.

If your child is drowsy, lethargic, vomiting, has a high fever, has fast or laboured breathing, or is refusing to drink fluids then take them to the Emergency Department at KK Women's and Children's Hospital or NUH for assessment by a paediatrician.

In Singapore, medical practitioners are required to notify any cases of HFM to the Ministry of Health so control measures can be put in place to prevent further spread of the disease.

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Above: Dr Rebecca Overton (third from right) and the team at Complete Healthcare International (CHI) at body with soul, 45 Rochester Park. Call 6776 2288 or log on to [www.chi-health.com.sg](http://www.chi-health.com.sg).

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