



DEPARTMENT OF  
**HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**

Promoting and protecting health, well-being, self-sufficiency, and safety of all in Marin County.

## **School and Child Care Guidance for Hand, Foot, and Mouth Disease** (Updated October 25, 2022)

### **What is hand, foot, and mouth disease?**

Hand, foot, and mouth disease (HFMD) is a viral infection that causes a blister-like rash involving the hands, feet, and mouth. The infection occurs most commonly in children less than 10 years of age and most often in the summer and fall months. Outbreaks may occur in child care settings and preschools.

### **What causes hand, foot, and mouth?**

Hand, foot, and mouth disease is a common, contagious illness caused by different viruses. It typically affects infants and children under age 5, but older kids and adults can catch it as well. It is often caused by the Coxsackievirus (most often A16), an enterovirus.

### **What are the symptoms?**

The first symptoms of HFMD are usually fever, sore throat, and not wanting to eat. About 1 to 2 days after fever begins, small red spots form in the mouth on the inside of the cheek, gums, and tongue. The spots may turn into blisters. A skin rash can also form on the hands, feet, and butt, and sometimes on the arms and legs. The rash might have raised or flat red spots and blisters. Not everyone with HFMD gets all of these symptoms. HFMD symptoms are usually mild and go away on their own in 7 to 10 days.

### **How is hand, foot, and mouth spread?**

The viruses leave the body through the stool of an infected person and enter another person when hands, food, or objects (such as toys) contaminated with stool are placed in the mouth. It is also spread through droplets that are expelled from the nose and mouth of an infected person during sneezing and coughing and by direct contact with respiratory secretions. It can also be spread through close contact with infected blister fluid.

### **How long does it take to get sick with hand, foot, and mouth after you have been exposed? (incubation period)**

From the time the child is exposed to hand, foot, and mouth disease, it takes 3 to 6 days for the first symptoms to show up.

### **How long is someone with hand, foot, and mouth contagious?**

Children are generally most contagious during the first week of illness. Children with hand, foot, and mouth disease may shed the virus from the respiratory tract (nose, mouth and lungs) for 1-3 weeks and in the stool for weeks to months after the infection starts and they are no longer having any symptoms.

### **Exclusion from School or Childcare**

- Children may not attend school or child care until:
  - They have not had a fever for **24 hours** (without use of fever reducing medications) **and**
  - Do not have excessive drooling due to open mouth sores **and**
  - The child is well enough to participate in routine activities (sores or rash may still be present).
- Exclusion from child care or school will not reduce the spread of hand, foot, and mouth disease because children can spread the virus even if they have no symptoms and the virus may be present in the stool for weeks after the symptoms are gone.
- **Testing for hand, foot and mouth is not required. Requiring testing or a doctor's note can be burdensome on medical providers and is not recommended since the majority of symptoms are mild and can be treated at home.**
- There may be special circumstances during a high occurrence of the disease in which Public Health may request that children be tested to identify the disease process, which will be determined in consultation with Public Health.

### **How can you control it from spreading?**

- Cover nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing and sneezing or cough/sneeze into your sleeve. Dispose of used tissues.
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm running water after using the bathroom, after changing diapers, after handling anything soiled with stool or secretions from the nose or mouth, and before preparing food or eating.
- Staff should closely monitor handwashing of all children after children have used the bathroom, or have been diapered and prior to eating or snacking
- Clean and disinfect the diapering area and potty chairs after each use and bathroom toilets, sinks, and toys at least daily and when soiled. Clean and sanitize mouthed toys, objects, and surfaces at least daily and when soiled.

### **When should you notify Marin County Public Health?**

- If you are notified that a child has been *admitted* to the hospital due to severe symptoms. Please note, a visit to the Emergency Department without being admitted does not need to be reported.