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Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease - symptoms, treatment and prevention

A viral infection usually caused by the coxsackie A virus; occasionally it is caused by other viruses such as an echovirus or enterovirus.

Symptoms

Symptoms include a slight fever, tiredness, loss of appetite, blisters in the mouth and on the hands and feet (colour plate no. 6) and a sore mouth for a few days before the ulcers or blisters appear. Affected young children may refuse to eat or drink.

Diagnosis is usually made by clinical examination.

Spread takes place through contact with the fluid in the blisters. This is most likely to occur when the virus becomes airborne during coughing and talking. Contact with faeces can also spread the infection.

Incubation period

(time between becoming infected and developing symptoms)

3 – 5 days.

Infectious period

(time during which an infected person can infect others)

As long as there is fluid in the blisters. The faeces can remain infectious for several weeks.

Treatment

Usually none is required. Use of paracetamol for the fever and any discomfort may be indicated.

Aspirin should not be given to children under 12 years of age unless specifically recommended by a doctor.

Control of spread

Exclude from child care, preschool and school until all blisters have dried.

The blisters should not be deliberately pierced or broken because the fluid within the blisters is infectious. The blisters will dry naturally.

Follow good hand washing techniques and keeping areas clean procedures.

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