

## HAND, FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE



Here is yet another reason to encourage our children to wash their hands. It can help prevent Hand, foot, and mouth disease (HFMD). Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease is a viral illness; however, the causative virus is quite different from that of Foot and Mouth Disease, which is a disease of animals.

Hand, foot, and mouth disease is a common illness of infants and children which is characterized by fever and blister-like eruptions in the mouth and/or a skin rash. In an effort to curtail the spread of this normally mild but also very contagious disease, the Ministry of Health is advising parents, guardians and teachers to take necessary precautions that include encouraging children to wash their hands frequently and thoroughly.

### **Symptoms**

- The disease usually begins with a fever, poor appetite, malaise (feeling vaguely unwell), and often with a sore throat.
- One or 2 days after fever onset, painful sores usually develop in the mouth. They begin as small red spots that blister and then often become ulcers. The sores are usually located on the tongue, gums, and inside of the cheeks.
- A non-itchy skin rash develops over 1–2 days. The rash has flat or raised red spots, sometimes with blisters. The rash is usually located on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet; it may also appear on the buttocks and/or genitalia.
- A person with HFMD may have only the rash or only the mouth sores.

## **Complications**

Complications from HFMD are not common, but if they do occur, medical attention should be sought.

- Viral or "aseptic" meningitis can rarely occur with HFMD. Viral meningitis causes fever, headache, stiff neck, or back pain. The condition is usually mild and clears without treatment; however, some patients may need to be hospitalized for a short time.
- Even more rarely, diseases such as encephalitis (swelling of the brain) or a polio-like paralysis can occur.

## **Treatment and Medical Management**

There is no specific treatment for HFMD and antibiotics are usually not necessary. Symptoms can be treated to provide relief from pain from mouth sores and from fever and aches.

- Fever and pain can be treated with medication such as panadol, paramol, paracetamol, or other non-aspirin, over-the-counter pain/fever relievers.
- Mouthwashes or sprays that numb pain can be used to lessen mouth pain.
- Remember to encourage children to drink enough fluids. Fluid intake should be enough to prevent dehydration (lack of body fluids).

## **Prevention**

A specific preventive for HFMD is not available, but the risk of infection can be lowered by following good hygiene practices including:

- Washing hands frequently and correctly and especially after changing diapers and after using the toilet
- Cleaning dirty surfaces and soiled items, including toys, first with soap and water and then disinfecting them by cleansing with a solution of chlorine bleach (made by adding 1 tablespoon of bleach to 4 cups of water)
- Avoiding close contact such as kissing, hugging, sharing eating utensils or cups with persons with HFMD