

UpToDate

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 Wolters Kluwer  
Health**Patient information: Hand, foot, and mouth disease (The Basics)**

Written by the doctors and editors at UpToDate

**What is hand, foot, and mouth disease?** — Hand, foot, and mouth disease is an infection that causes sores to form in the mouth, and on the hands, feet, buttocks, and sometimes the genitals. A related infection, called "herpangina," causes sores to form in the mouth. Both infections most often affect children, but adults can get them, too. This article is about hand, foot, and mouth disease, but herpangina and hand, foot, and mouth disease are treated the same.

Hand, foot, and mouth disease usually goes away on its own within 2 to 3 days. There are treatments to help with its symptoms.

**What are the symptoms of hand, foot, and mouth disease?** — The main symptom is sores that form in the mouth, and on the hands, feet, buttocks, and sometimes the genitals. The sores in the mouth can make swallowing painful. The sores on the hands and feet are not usually painful. The infection also usually causes fever.

**How does hand, foot, and mouth disease spread?** — The virus that causes hand, foot, and mouth disease can travel in body fluids of an infected person. For example, the virus can be found in:

- Mucus from the nose
- Saliva
- Fluid from one of the sores
- Traces of bowel movements

People with hand, foot, and mouth disease are most likely to spread the infection during the first week of their illness. But the virus can live in their body well after the symptoms have gone away.

**Is there a test for hand, foot, and mouth disease?** — Yes, but it is not usually necessary. The doctor or nurse should be able to tell if your child has it by learning about your child's symptoms and doing an exam.

**Should I call my child's doctor or nurse?** — You should call your child's doctor or nurse if your child is drinking less than usual and hasn't had a wet diaper for 4 to 6 hours (for babies and young children) or hasn't needed to urinate in the past 6 to 8 hours (for older children). You should also call your child's doctor or nurse if your child seems to be getting worse or isn't getting better after a few days.

**How is hand, foot, and mouth disease treated?** — The infection itself is not treated. It usually goes away on its own within a few days. But children who are in pain can take nonprescription medicines such as acetaminophen (sample brand name: Tylenol) or ibuprofen (sample brand names: Advil, Motrin) to relieve pain. Never give aspirin to a child younger than 18 years. In children, aspirin can cause a serious problem called Reye syndrome.

The sores in the mouth can make swallowing painful, so some children might not want to eat or drink. It is important to make sure that children get enough fluids so that they don't get dehydrated. Cold foods, like popsicles and ice-cream, can help to numb the pain. Soft foods, like pudding and gelatin, might be easier to swallow.

**Can hand, foot, and mouth disease be prevented?** — Yes. The most important thing you can do to prevent the spread of this infection is to wash your hands often with soap and water. You should also teach your children to wash often, especially after using the bathroom. It's also important to keep your home clean and to disinfect tabletops, toys, and other things that a child might touch.

If your child has hand, foot, and mouth disease, keep him or her away from other people during the first week of the illness.

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