

# Hand Foot & Mouth Disease

## Information Sheet

**Te Whatu Ora**  
Health New Zealand

Contact: Population Health Te Whatu Ora Te Matau a Māui Hawke's Bay  
76 Wellesley Road, Napier | 06 834 1815 | [ourhealthhb.nz](http://ourhealthhb.nz)

### What is it?

Hand Foot and Mouth Disease is an infection caused by a virus called enterovirus. It causes painful sores in the mouth and blisters on the hands and feet.

Hand, foot and mouth disease appears most often in warm weather – usually in the summer or early autumn.

The disease in humans is not related to foot and mouth disease in animals.

### What are the signs and symptoms?

The illness usually starts with a mild fever, about 3-5 days after being exposed to the virus.

After the fever, you may develop:

- Painful red blisters on your tongue, mouth, palms of your hands, or soles of your feet (as shown in the pictures)
- Loss of appetite
- A sore throat and mouth
- A general feeling of weakness or tiredness.



### How serious is it?

Hand Foot and Mouth is generally a mild disease and most people recover in 7-10 days. Usually there are no complications

Rarely, a person can develop viral meningitis (an infection around the brain and spinal cord).

### Who is most at risk?

Anyone can get Hand Foot and Mouth Disease, but it is most common in children under 10 years.

If a pregnant woman catches the virus shortly before giving birth, the infection can be passed on to the baby. Most babies born with Hand Foot and Mouth Disease have only mild symptoms.

In very rare cases the illness may cause miscarriage or affect a baby's development.

If you are pregnant and have contact with the virus or develop any kind of rash, you should see your doctor or lead maternity carer (LMC) – just to be safe.

### How could I get infected?

The infection is passed from one person to another by coughing or sneezing, or by contact with mucus, saliva, blisters or the faeces of an infected person.

You are usually infectious for 7-10 days.

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### How do I protect myself and others?

The best prevention is to regularly wash your hands with soap and water.

Stay away from others who have Hand Foot and Mouth Disease. If your child has it, do not share their toys with others while they are sick.

### Will I need to take time off work, school or preschool?

Anyone with Hand Foot and Mouth Disease needs to stay away from childcare, school or work until their blisters have dried.

If the person is feeling well, AND the blisters are able to be covered they may be able to go to school or work.

### How is it treated?

The only medicine recommend for Hand Foot and Mouth Disease is paracetamol.

Most blisters disappear without causing problems.

In the mouth, some blisters may become shallow, painful sores that look similar to cold sores. If your child's mouth is sore, don't give them sour, salty or spicy foods.

Drink plenty of water.

### Where can I get further information?

You can find more information at [health.govt.nz](http://health.govt.nz) or contact Healthline 24/7 to speak to a registered nurse 0800 611 116.

### When should I seek help for my child?

You should take your child to your family doctor if:

- They haven't been able to drink because of a painful mouth
- They have had fewer than 4 wet nappies in 24 hours
- They seem to be getting worse or are not getting better after a few days

Call Healthline on 0800 611 116 if you are unsure what you should do.

Credits:

- [nhs.uk](http://nhs.uk)
- [healthnavigator.org.nz](http://healthnavigator.org.nz)
- [health.govt.nz](http://health.govt.nz)

**If a child with suspected hand, foot and mouth disease complains of severe headache, if fever persists, or if there are any worrying symptoms, see your doctor immediately.**