**Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease**

**Overview**

Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease is a common infection that usually affects infants and young children during the summer months. However, it can also affect adults. Symptoms of hand, foot and mouth disease usually include fever, blister-like ulcers in the mouth and a skin rash.

Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease is caused by a group of viruses called Enterovirus. Usually it is caused by the Coxsakie virus A16 but sometimes, it can be caused by the Enterovirus 71. It is a highly infectious disease.

**Mode of Transmission**

Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease is transmitted from person to person by direct contact with the infectious viruses that cause the disease. These viruses are found in high quantities in the secretions of the infected person's nose and throat, i.e. saliva, nasal mucus and phlegm. They are also found in the fluid of the blisters of the patient's skin. The viruses are spread when the infection person touch objects that are then touched by other people.

The most contagious period is the first week of the infection. However, after the infection has gone, the viruses can remain in the infected person's body for a couple of weeks. Therefore, the infected person may still be able to pass the viruses to other people despite looking entirely well on the surface. Moreover, asymptomatic infection sometimes occurs; this means the infected person may...
spread the infection without knowing it.

**Signs and Symptoms**

The incubation time of Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease is usually three to five days. The infection usually begins with a fever. He/she will also have a vague feeling of being unwell. A sore throat is a common symptom at the beginning of the infection. After a day or two, the infected person begins to develop very painful sores (herpangina) inside his/her mouth, particularly near the back. In the next two to three days, the patient will have a skin rash that consists of multiple small fluid-filled blisters. Most of the blisters are concentrated on the palms and soles.

In young children, the rash may also appear on the buttocks and genital areas.

Not all the patients will get the full picture of the infection. From time to time, there are cases with only mouth sores or skin rashes only.

**Mouth sores**

Multiple blisters on palms and soles

**Management and Prevention**

There is no specific treatment for Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease. The treatment
given to the infected persons is symptomatic and supportive. Anti-pyretics such as paracetamol may be used for relieving the discomfort from mouth sores and fever. However, in children, aspirin must never be used.

More practical is to use mouthwashes or sprays to numb the pain of mouth sores so as to allow eating and drinking.

Prevention is most important. At the moment, there is no vaccine to protect against the viruses that cause hand, foot and mouth disease. However, one can minimize the chance of infection by taking good and proper hygiene measures, such as

- hands washing with detergent and water
- regular disinfection of surfaces and toys

• wearing of face mask
• avoiding sharing of eating utensils and close contact with infected persons

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