



Health & Safety Notes California Childcare Health Program

Hand-Foot-and-Mouth Disease (Coxsackie A) in the Child Care Setting

What is it?

Hand-foot-and-mouth disease is a common and mild childhood illness caused by a virus (coxsackievirus A16).

What are the symptoms?

In many people, infection with the virus causes mild or no symptoms. Symptoms include sores in the mouth followed by a rash of tiny painful blisters on the hands and feet. Symptoms may also include mild fever, sore throat and stomach ache. It is most common in the summer and fall. The fluid in these blisters contains the virus, and symptoms may last for seven to 10 days. The infection usually goes away without any serious complications.

How is it spread?

This viral illness spreads easily among children through direct contact with saliva, from blisters in the mouth, the fluid from blisters on the hands and feet, or through the infected person's stool (bowel movement). Outbreaks in child care facilities usually happen when an increased number of cases occurs in the community.

Should the child stay home?

A child with hand-foot-and-mouth disease does not need to stay home as long as s/he is feeling well enough to participate. Exclusion may not prevent additional cases since the virus may be present in the stool for weeks after the symptoms have disappeared, and children may have been exposed before the symptoms appeared. A child with hand-foot-and-mouth disease usually does not need treatment and will get better on his own within a week.

How can we limit the spread?

- Follow strict handwashing and personal hygiene procedures (see our Good Hygiene Fact Sheet).
- Always wash hands, especially after using the bathroom, diapering or assisting the child in the bathroom, and before eating or handling food.
- Wash and disinfect all articles contaminated with stool or mucus.

If an outbreak of Hand-Foot-and-Mouth Disease occurs in the child care setting:

- Notify parents and staff members.
- Make sure that all children and adults use good handwashing technique.

References

The ABCs of Safe and Healthy Child Care, A Handbook for Child Care Providers, Centers for Diseases Control and Prevention (CDC), 1997.

Healthy Young Children, a Manual for Programs, NAEYC, 1995 Edition.

Keeping Kids Healthy, Preventing and Managing Communicable Disease in Child Care, California Department of Education, 1994.

Stepping Stones to Using "Caring for Our Children", National Health and Safety Performance Standards, Guidelines for Out-Of-Home Child Care Programs, Maternal & Child Health Bureau, 1997.