

Hand, Foot, and Mouth Disease (HFMD)

Hand, foot, and mouth disease (HFMD) is a common viral illness of infants and children. It is characterized by fever, sores in the mouth, and a rash with vesicles (blisters). HFMD begins with a mild fever, poor appetite, fatigue, and, frequently, a sore throat. One or two days after the fever begins, sores 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. The skin rash develops over 1–2 days with flat or raised red spots, some forming fluid-filled vesicles (blisters). The rash does not itch and is usually located on the palms of the hands and the soles of the feet. It may also appear on the buttocks. A person with HFMD may have only the rash or the mouth ulcers.

Several related viruses cause HFMD. They are spread from person to person by direct contact with nose and throat discharges or the stool of infected persons. A person is most contagious during the first week of the illness but may shed the virus after symptoms are gone. HFMD is not transmitted to or from pets or other animals.

Students with a rash illness, especially if fever and/or other symptoms are present, should be referred to a health care provider for diagnosis. Students should not return to school until after the fever is gone (normally for 24 hours) and the child feels well enough to participate in normal activities.

Exclude students only if they are too ill to participate in school activities. Isolation is not necessary.