

# Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease

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## Definition

- A viral infection that causes mouth ulcers and tiny blisters on the hands and feet

## Symptoms

- Small painful ulcers in the mouth, especially on tongue and sides of mouth (in all children)
- Small, thick-walled water blisters (like chickenpox) or red spots located on the palms, soles, and webs between the fingers and toes (70%)
- 1 to 5 water blisters per hand or foot
- Small blisters or red spots on the buttocks (30%)
- Low-grade fever less than 102° F (39° C)
- Mainly occurs in children age 6 months to 4 years

## Cause

- [Coxsackie A-16 virus](#)
- Not related to animal disease

## Care Advice

1. Reassurance: Hand-foot-mouth disease is a harmless viral rash.
2. Liquid Antacid for Mouth Pain:
  - a. Use a liquid antacid 4 times per day.
  - b. For younger children, put ½ teaspoon (2 ml) in the front of the mouth 4 times per day after meals.
  - c. Children over age 4 can use 1 teaspoon (5 ml) as a mouthwash after meals.
3. Soft Diet:
  - a. Encourage favorite fluids to prevent dehydration.
  - b. Cold drinks, milkshakes, popsicles, slushes, and sherbet are good choices.
  - c. Avoid citrus, salty, or spicy foods.
  - d. For infants, give fluids by cup, spoon or syringe rather than a bottle. (Reason: The nipple can cause pain.)
  - e. Solid food intake is not important.



4. Fever Medicine: Give acetaminophen (e.g., Tylenol) or ibuprofen for fever above 102° F (39° C) or severe mouth pain.
5. Contagiousness: Quite contagious but a mild and harmless disease. Incubation period is 3-6 days. Can return to child care or school after the fever is gone (usually 2 to 3 days). The rash is not contagious.
6. Expected Course:
  - a. The fever lasts 2 or 3 days.
  - b. The mouth ulcers resolve by 7 days.
  - c. The rash on the hands and feet lasts 10 days. The rash on the hands and feet may then peel.

## When To Call

### *Call Your Doctor Now (night or day) If*

- Your child looks or acts very sick
- Signs of [dehydration](#) (e.g., very dry mouth, no tears, no urine in more than 8 hours)
- Stiff neck, severe headache or acting confused (delirious)

### *Call Your Doctor Within 24 Hours (between 9 am and 4 pm) If*

- You think your child needs to be seen
- Red, swollen and tender gums
- Ulcers and sores also present on outer lip
- Fever present for more than 3 days
- Call Your Doctor During Weekday Office Hours If
- You have other questions or concerns

*Adapted from The American Academy of Pediatrics (2011) at [www.healthychildren.org](http://www.healthychildren.org)*

