

Hand Foot and Mouth Disease Factsheet

Since the beginning of February 2025, hand, foot, and mouth disease (HFMD) cases have been reported in educational institutions in the eThekweni District. These cases have been found in primary schools and daycare centres in the district's northern region.

Hand, foot, and mouth disease (HFMD) is a viral infection that commonly affects infants and children under 10 years of age. It is caused by a group of viruses known as enteroviruses, which infect millions each year, globally. Small outbreaks often occur in day-care centres or crèches during the summer and autumn. The condition is generally mild and self-limiting, meaning those affected typically recover within 7 to 10 days. Hand, foot, and mouth disease does not occur in animals and should not be confused with foot and mouth disease (also called hoof-and-mouth disease), which affects animals such as sheep and cattle.

Transmission

- Direct contact – Touching an infected person's saliva, nasal secretions, or blisters.
- Droplets – Coughing or sneezing spreads the virus in the air.
- Contaminated surfaces & objects – Shared toys, stationery, and utensils.
- Contact with faeces – Poor hand hygiene after using the toilet or changing diapers.

Signs and Symptoms

Symptoms usually start 3 to 7 days after infection and last 7 to 10 days. Common signs and symptoms include:

- Fever
- Sore throat
- Fatigue
- Loss of appetite
- Small blisters on the inside of the mouth, sides of the tongue, palms of the hands, and soles of the feet.

Diagnosis and Treatment

- HFMD is usually diagnosed clinically based on symptoms. In severe cases, throat or stool samples may be collected and sent to a laboratory for confirmation and to rule out other diagnoses.
- There is no specific vaccine or treatment for HFMD. Individual symptoms like fever and pain can be treated with medication.
- Affected individuals should rest and stay hydrated. The infection is usually self-limiting and resolves in 7 to 10 days without medication.
- Some individuals may need hospital admission for complications. Those with severe symptoms should seek care immediately.

Prevention

- Educators and parents should encourage good hygiene practices such as regular handwashing and not sharing eating utensils (e.g., cutlery, cups, toothbrushes).
- Surfaces and other shared items, such as toys and stationery, should be cleaned regularly.
- Children should avoid direct contact with individuals who are ill.
- Affected children should not be excluded from school if they are well enough to attend, and there is no indication to close schools or restrict attendance when cases arise.