

## **MEDIA STATEMENT**

To: Editors & Health Journalists  
Issued by: Department of Health  
Date: 18 February 2025

### **Health Department calls for calm amid hand, foot and mouth Disease (HFMD) outbreak**

**Pretoria:** The Department of Health calls for calm following an outbreak of Hand, Foot, and Mouth Disease (HFMD) in KwaZulu-Natal province, mostly around Durban. The Department, working with the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) is closely monitoring the situation while providing necessary support to the province to contain the spread of this fairly common viral infection, which mainly affects infants and children.

There is no need for the public to panic because the outbreak remains under control and at the current moment there is no serious public health threat detected. However, parents and caregivers are urged to be vigilant in case their children display common symptoms such as fever, sore throat, tiredness, loss of appetite and small blisters on the inside of the mouth, sides of the tongue, palms of the hands and soles of the feet. A small minority of individuals with HFMD may need to be admitted to hospital for treatment of complications. Infected individuals with severe disease or complications must go to the nearest healthcare facility.

The infection is usually self-limiting and clears without medication after 7 to 10 days. This means that one can recover without taking treatment or medication. Parents are urged to keep symptomatic children at home until they recover to prevent further spread of the disease.

Hygiene practices are some of the most effective preventative and control methods to contain the spread of the disease, hence educators and parents are encouraged to promote good hygiene habits at homes and school environment including regular hand-washing, covering mouth when coughing, regularly cleaning surfaces and not sharing eating utensils and stationery.

The Department has been inundated with enquiries from the media and members of the community about the outbreak and possible health threat. The disease is caused by a group of viruses known as enteroviruses, and it mainly occurs in small outbreaks at schools, crèches and day-care centres during the summer and autumn months.

HFMD spreads from person-to-person by direct contact or by droplets from the mouth or nose of an infected person. The virus may also be spread through contaminated objects (e.g. toys, stationery) and faeces. Children under the age of 10 years are at greatest risk of infection. It is not common in adults, but people with weak immune systems may be prone to infection.

HFMD affects humans and it is completely different from foot-and-mouth disease, otherwise known as hoof-and-mouth disease which mainly affects farm animals like sheep and cattle. Thus, the two diseases are not related and are caused by different viruses.

Although, HFMD is not part of the notifiable medical conditions, the Department remains on high alert to monitor the number of cases in KZN and to detect outbreaks, if experienced, in other parts of the country.

For more information, visit:

- NICD disease index: <https://www.nicd.ac.za/diseases-a-z-index/hand-foot-and-mouth-disease/>
- WHO: A guide to clinical management and public health response for hand, foot and mouth disease (HFMD): <https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/207490>

Health care workers: Contact the NICD Hotline on 0800 212 55

**For more information and media enquiries, please contact:**

Mr Foster Mohale  
Health Departmental Spokesperson  
0724323792  
[Foster.mohale@health.gov.za](mailto:Foster.mohale@health.gov.za)

Mr Sello Lediga  
Media Liaison Officer for the Minister of Health  
0823539859  
[Sello.Lediga@health.gov.za](mailto:Sello.Lediga@health.gov.za)