

2. HAND, FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE

Date: _____

Dear Parent or Guardian,

There has been a case of hand, foot and mouth disease within your child's school and your child may have been exposed.

What is hand, foot and mouth disease?

This is a disease caused by a group of viruses which usually affects young children. It causes blisters on hands and feet, and mouth ulcers inside the cheeks and on the tongue. They may also have a sore throat and high temperature. These symptoms last for 7–10 days.

Is it dangerous?

No. All make a full recovery.

Is it the same as foot and mouth disease in cows?

No. A completely different virus causes foot and mouth disease in cows.

How is it spread?

The virus is spread by coughs and sneezes, and is also found in the faeces of infected children. Some children infected with the virus do not have symptoms but can still pass it to others.

Is there any treatment?

There is no specific treatment for hand, foot and mouth disease – it is usually a mild and self-limiting illness. If a child feels unwell paracetamol may help. Antibiotics and creams or ointments for the blisters are not effective. Children recover just as quickly without them.

What is the incubation period?

Symptoms start 3-5 days after exposure to the virus.

How long are children infectious?

Children who are ill are infectious. Also they may carry the virus in their faeces for many weeks after they have recovered and so can continue to pass on infection.

How long should children stay away from school?

Children who are unwell should be kept off school until they are feeling better.

Keeping children off school for longer than this is unlikely to stop the virus spreading. There may be other children in the school who appear well but are spreading the virus.

How can spread be prevented?

Since the virus is found in faeces, scrupulous attention must always be paid to hand washing after using the toilet.

Can you catch it more than once?

Yes, but children who are ill during an outbreak at school or nursery are unlikely to get it again during the same outbreak.

Thank you for giving this your attention. Your GP will be able to answer any further questions that you might have about hand, foot and mouth disease.