

## **Information from the OCS Health Office**

September, 2016

The following is a condition that frequently occurs in school children.

### **What is hand, foot and mouth disease?**

Hand, foot and mouth disease is a viral infection caused by a strain of Coxsackie virus. It causes a blister-like rash that, as the name implies, involves the hands, feet and mouth. (Hand, foot and mouth disease is different than foot-and-mouth disease, which is an infection of cattle, pigs, sheep, goats and deer and is caused by a different virus.)

### **Who gets hand, foot and mouth disease?**

The infection usually occurs in children under 10 years of age, but occasionally can occur in young adults.

### **How is it spread?**

The virus is spread by direct contact with nose and throat discharges, blisters and feces of infected people.

### **What are the symptoms and when do they start?**

Symptoms of fever, poor appetite, runny nose and sore throat can appear three to five days after exposure. A blister-like rash on the hands, feet and in the mouth usually develops one to two days after the initial symptoms.

### **When and how long can someone spread the disease?**

A person is contagious when the first symptoms appear and may continue until the blister-like skin lesions disappear. The virus has been known to be shed in the stool for up to several weeks.

### **How is hand, foot and mouth disease diagnosed?**

The diagnosis is generally suspected on the appearance of blister-like rash on hands and feet and mouth in a child with a mild febrile illness. Although specific viral tests are available to confirm the diagnosis, they are rarely performed due to expense and length of time needed to complete the tests.

## **Does a prior infection with Coxsackie virus make a person immune?**

Specific immunity can occur, but a second episode is possible from a different strain of Coxsackie virus.

## **What is the treatment?**

There is no specific treatment. Treatment is aimed at fever control and maintaining good oral hydration.

## **Can there be complications associated with hand, foot and mouth disease?**

The illness is typically mild, complications are rare.

## **What can be done to prevent the spread of this disease?**

Children who feel ill or have a fever should be excluded from group settings until the fever is gone and the child feels well. Thorough hand washing and care with diaper changing practices is important as well.

## **Is there a risk for pregnant women?**

There is debate as to any congenital disorders related to Coxsackie viral infections and pregnancy. Pregnant women should consult their obstetrician for further information.