

**Cumbria and Lancashire Health
Protection Unit**

**Hand, Foot and
Mouth Disease**

INFORMATION LEAFLET

Produced by North West Communicable Disease Policy Sub Group

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. These last for 7 to 10 days.

Is it dangerous?

No. Complete recovery is the rule.

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

No. Foot and mouth disease in cows is caused by a completely different virus (although farmers can catch foot and mouth disease from sick cows).

How is it spread?

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

Is there any treatment?

If a child feels off-colour paracetamol (such as Calpol or Disprol) may help. Antibiotics and creams or ointments for the blisters are useless. Children recover just as quickly without them.

What is the incubation period?

3 – 5 days.

How long are children infectious?

Children who are ill are infectious. They can carry the virus in their faeces for many weeks after they have got better so may continue to pass it on.

How long should children stay off 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 handwashing 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.