



## Hand, foot and mouth disease

February 2008

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

Hand, foot and mouth disease (HFMD) is a mild viral infection caused by different human viruses (e.g. Coxsackie A, enterovirus and echovirus). HFMD is not the same as the Foot and Mouth Disease of cattle.

### How do you get hand, foot and mouth disease?

HFMD infection is spread from person to person by direct contact with nose and throat discharges or the faeces of an infected person. Everyone is susceptible to infection but many adults will have developed immunity to this infection as a child.

### Incubation and infectious period

The incubation period is usually around 3 - 5 days. The infectious period remains while there is fluid in the blisters and in the faeces for several weeks after onset of illness.

### What are the signs and symptoms hand, foot and mouth disease?

HFMD usually begins with a mild fever, runny nose followed by a sore throat; and the appearance of blister-like rash in the mouth and on the hands and feet which gradually become ulcerated. Less commonly, these ulcers appear in the nappy area.

### What are the complications?

Complications are rare, but this infection can sometimes cause viral meningitis. This is a condition which causes a fever, headache, stiff neck or back pain and may need hospitalisation for a few days.

### How do I get treated?

No specific treatment is required for this infection. However, treatment may be necessary to relieve symptoms e.g. blisters in the mouth.

### How do I reduce the risks of getting hand, foot and mouth disease?

There is currently no vaccine available for this infection. The following action is recommended:

- Children should be excluded from child care, schools or other group settings until the blisters have dried;
- Hand washing with soap and water before preparing food, after changing nappies or using the toilet;
- Clean the surface areas of changing mats (after changing nappies) with detergent and water, wipe dry and wipe over the area with bleach (as per manufactures' instruction).

### Where can I find more information on foot and mouth disease?

- Contact your GP or
- Your Regional Population Health Unit (see below)

Upper North Metro	9345 7100	Kimberley	9141 1630	Port Hedland	9140 2377
Lower North	9224 1603	Geraldton	9956 1950	Bunbury	9792 2500
Perth - South	9431 0200	Kalgoorlie	9021 2622	Carnarvon	9941 0560
Albany	9842 7500	Northam	9622 4320		