HAND FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE

What is it?

Hand foot and mouth disease is caused by a virus (coxsackievirus). It usually affects children under 10 years but can occur in adults.

How do I know if someone has it?

The illness usually starts suddenly with a sore throat, temperature (fever) and blisters inside the mouth and throat. Blisters may appear on the palms, fingers and soles.

Is it infectious?

The infection can be spread when a person has direct or close contact with discharges of the nose, throat or blisters of someone in the acute stage of illness. It can also be passed on from contact with the faeces of an infected person.

What is the incubation period?

The illness usually appears 3 to 5 days after someone has been in contact with an infected person.

Is there any treatment?

There is no specific treatment for the infection. The infected person will get better on their own without treatment. The blisters in the mouth usually clear within 4 to 6 days and the blisters on the body usually last for 7 to 10 days.

What should I do if someone has the illness?

- A child who has a temperature should be kept cool by a fan or reducing the amount of clothing / bedding. If advised by a doctor or nurse, give paracetamol to children in the dose prescribed for the child’s age.
- Make sure handkerchiefs are washed well in a washing machine or hot soapy water. Always wash your hands well after handling them.
- Make sure that a person with the illness washes their hands with warm soapy water after using the toilet and before handling or eating food. Special care should be taken with this for some time after the illness.
- Make sure the toilet is kept clean. Use diluted bleach (one part bleach in ten parts water) to clean the toilet, making sure you clean the handle as well as the seat.
- Pregnant women should avoid contact if possible.
- If worried seek advice from your GP.

How soon can someone with the illness return to school or work?

A person should stay away while they feel ill and have obvious blisters.