

# **HAND, FOOT, AND MOUTH DISEASE AND PREGNANCY**

(Enteroviral Infections)

## **What viruses are in the enterovirus group?**

The enterovirus groups consist of 24 group-A coxsackieviruses, 6 group-B coxsackieviruses, 34 echoviruses, and 5 enteroviruses. Infection with an enterovirus results in immunity to that specific virus, but not to other viruses of the enterovirus group.

## **What illness does it cause?**

Hand, foot, and mouth disease (HFMD) is a common illness of infants and young children. Symptoms include low-grade fever that may last 1 to 2 days, runny nose and/or sore throat. Blister-like rash occurs in the mouth, on the sides of the tongue, inside the cheeks, and on the gums. These sores may last 7 to 10 days. Blister-like rash may occur on the palms and fingers of the hands and on the soles of the feet. The disease is usually self-limited, but in rare cases has been fatal in infants.

## **Is HFMD illness serious?**

HFMD illness is usually not serious. HFMD caused by coxsackievirus A16 infection is a mild disease and nearly all patients recover without medical treatment in 7 to 10 days. Complications are uncommon. Rarely, the patient with coxsackievirus A16 infection may also develop “aseptic” or viral meningitis, in which the person has fever, headache, stiff neck, or back pain, and may need to be hospitalized for a few days. Another cause of HFMD, enterovirus 71 (EV71) may also cause viral meningitis and, rarely, more serious diseases, such as encephalitis, or a poliomyelitis-like paralysis. EV71 encephalitis may be fatal. Newborns without maternal antibody who acquire this infection are at risk for serious disease with a high mortality rate.

## **I’ve recently been exposed to someone with enteroviruses. How will this exposure affect my pregnancy?**

Enteroviruses, including those causing HFMD, are very common. Therefore, pregnant women are frequently exposed to them, especially during summer and fall months. Most enteroviral infections during pregnancy cause mild or no illness in the mother. Although the available information is limited, currently there is no clear evidence that maternal enteroviral infection causes adverse outcomes of pregnancy such as abortion, stillbirth, or congenital defects. However, mothers infected shortly before delivery may pass the virus to the newborn. Babies born to mothers who have symptoms of enteroviral illness around the time of delivery are more likely to be infected. Most newborns infected with an enterovirus have mild illness, but, in rare cases, they may develop an overwhelming infection of many organs, including the liver and heart, and die from the infection. The risk of this severe illness in newborns is higher during the first two weeks of life.

## **If I develop HFMD, what do I need to do about my pregnancy?**

If you were exposed to HFMD, consult your healthcare provider for information about diagnosis, possible lab tests, and follow-up.

## **Is there any way I can keep from being infected with HFMD?**

There is no preventive vaccine. Most people with HFMD have no or few symptoms, but they can spread the viruses in secretions from the nose or mouth and in stool. Specific prevention for HFMD or other non-polio enterovirus infections is not available, but the risk of infection can be lowered by good hygienic practices.

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**So throughout the pregnancy, practice good personal hygiene to reduce the risk of exposure to enteroviruses:**

- Wash your hands with soap and water after contact with diapers and secretions from the nose or mouth.
- DO NOT kiss children on the mouth.
- DO NOT share food, drinks, or utensils (spoons or forks), or cups.
- Clean and sanitize items contaminated with secretions from the nose or mouth. Clean and disinfect items contaminated with stool.

For more information, call Hennepin County HSPHD-Epidemiology at (612) 543-5230 or call your local health department.