

本署檔號 Our Ref. : (32) in CDB/8/22/1 Pt.4
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5 July 2023

Dear Principal / Person-in-charge,

Vigilance against Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease (HFMD)

I would like to draw your attention to the recent increase in activity of hand, foot and mouth disease (HFMD) and urge schools to be vigilant against the disease.

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health recorded a recent increase in the number of HFMD institutional outbreaks in the recent weeks, from three (affecting nine persons) in the week ending 17 June to nine (affecting 53 persons) last week. There were seven outbreaks (affecting 17 persons) recorded in the first three days this week (ending on 8 July). In addition, surveillance of HFMD based at sentinel child care centre/kindergartens and general out-patient clinics also recorded corresponding increases in HFMD activity recently.

HFMD is an infection commonly seen in children. In Hong Kong, HFMD occurs throughout the year with the usual peak season occurring from May to July. A smaller peak may also occur from October to December. Common symptoms of HFMD include fever, sore throat and skin rash over the hands and feet. Although HFMD is usually self-limiting, some patients, especially those infected with enterovirus 71 (EV71), may develop complications like myocarditis, encephalitis or poliomyelitis-like paralysis.

Maintaining good personal and environmental hygiene is the most important measure to prevent HFMD. **Alcohol-based handrub should not substitute hand hygiene with liquid soap and water, as alcohol does not effectively kill some viruses causing HFMD (e.g. EV71).** Schools are recommended to take the following measures to prevent outbreaks:

- Maintain good communication with parents and advise them to keep their children at home for rest when they develop fever or rash. People who develop symptoms suggestive of HFMD should seek medical advice promptly.
- Encourage staff to screen children for signs and symptoms of HFMD before they enter the school. Children with HFMD should be excluded from school until fever has subsided and all the vesicles have dried and crusted. As an extra precaution, children with EV71 infection are advised not to go to school for another two weeks after all symptoms subsided, since the virus may be excreted in stool for some weeks and the infection is associated with a higher risk of complications.



- Supervise children on personal hygiene practices, especially on how to wash the hands properly with liquid soap before meals and after going to toilet, cover nose and mouth while sneezing or coughing, and proper disposal of nasal and mouth discharge.
- Avoid high risk play facilities such as ball pools.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surface, furniture and toilets regularly with 1 in 99 diluted household bleach (mixing 1 part of 5.25% bleach with 99 parts of water). Disinfect toys/places which are contaminated by secretions or excreta with 1 in 49 diluted household bleach.
- Ensure the household bleach used has not expired. For effective disinfection, diluted bleach should be used within 24 hours after preparation as effectiveness would decrease with time if left unused.
- As undiluted bleach liberates a toxic gas when exposed to sunlight, it should be stored in a cool and shaded place out of reach of children.
- Remind staff to wash hands thoroughly with liquid soap and water after changing diapers for each child, to disinfect diaper-change area by diluted bleach, and to dispose soiled diapers properly.
- Keep the environment clean and hygienic, and follow the “Guidelines on Prevention of Communicable Diseases in Schools/Kindergartens /Kindergartens-cum-Child Care Centres /Child Care Centres” which is available at http://www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/guidelines_on_prevention_of_communicable_diseases_in_schools_kindergartens_kindergartens_cum_child_care-centres_child_are_centres.pdf.
- Incorporate in your health education to children that when they are having holidays outside Hong Kong, they should still remember to keep their hands clean and avoid touching vesicles on hands of other sick children.

If there is a suspected HFMD outbreak (e.g. two or more students in the same class or in the same setting in a CCC/KG developing symptoms of HFMD in succession within a short time), please inform the Central Notification Office of the CHP as early as possible by fax (2477 2770), phone (2477 2772) or email (diseases@dh.gov.hk). CHP will give advice on the management of such cases and take appropriate control measures.

We may consider advising schools to suspend classes for a period of 14 days when situation warrants. Examples of such scenarios include occurrence of further cases in an institution attended by a confirmed case of EV71 infection after stepping up control measures, OR occurrence of a HFMD outbreak in an institution with a case of EV71 infection who is suffering from severe complication. For more information, please visit the website of CHP at http://www.chp.gov.hk/en/view_content/16354.html.

Yours faithfully,



(Dr SK CHUANG)
for Controller, Centre for Health Protection
Department of Health