



health matters

kid's
health
update!

Coxsackie virus. what you need to know to protect your family.

What is a coxsackie (cox-ak-ee) virus?

You've probably heard of hand, foot, and mouth disease before. Well, coxsackie is the virus that causes it. Named after Coxsackie, NY where it was first discovered, it is part of the enterovirus family that live in the digestive tract. The virus can spread from person to person, usually on unwashed hands and surfaces contaminated by feces, where they can live for several days. In cooler climates, it is most commonly seen in summer and early fall. The virus commonly affects children.

What should I look for?

Classically, children will present with painful blisters in the back of the mouth, on the tongue, on the palms and fingers of the hands, on the soles of the feet, sometimes on the buttocks and/or in the diaper area. These blisters appear 3-6 days after exposure, are filled with active virus and usually last 7 to 10 days. Ouch! Other symptoms can include a low grade fever, decreased activity and a decreased appetite and usually precede the formation of the ulcers.

How is the diagnosis made?

Doctors diagnose a coxsackie virus by performing a physical exam and looking for telltale symptoms, such as rash or blisters. They might also test stool or fluids from the back of the throat to see if the virus is present.

Is it contagious?

Yes. Highly. Children with hand-foot-mouth disease are contagious while

they have blisters and continue to be contagious for weeks after the blisters disappear. You need to bear in mind that many children with coxsackie viruses have no symptoms at all, yet the virus may be present in the saliva for 7 to 10 days and in the stool for months (making them contagious for months).

How does the virus spread?

Coxsackie viruses are usually passed from person to person on unwashed hands and surfaces contaminated by feces and the virus itself. They can also be spread through droplets of fluid sprayed into the air when someone sneezes, coughs or dribbles. When an outbreak of coxsackie virus affects a community, risk for infection is highest among infants and children younger than 5. The virus spreads easily in group settings like schools, child-care centers, or summer camps. Houseflies help spread coxsackie virus by carrying it on their feet and mouthparts. Coxsackie viruses survive long enough on toys and other objects to make them agents of spread as well.

How can I prevent my child from getting coxsackie virus?

Hand washing is the best prevention. Remind members of your family to wash their hands frequently, particularly after using the toilet (especially those in public places), after changing a diaper, before meals and before preparing food. Shared toys in child-care centers should be routinely cleaned with a disinfectant because

the virus can live on these objects for days.

Children who are sick with a coxsackie virus should be kept out of school or child-care for a few days to avoid spreading the infection.

Is there a treatment for Coxsackie?

Like most viruses, there is no treatment for the infection. However, medications such as pain relievers and/or antihistamines can be given to alleviate discomfort. Ask JNR pharmacists for any updates on new treatment recommendations.

Can my child get hand-foot-mouth disease more than once?

It's unlikely. However, if exposed to a different strain of the coxsackie virus, your child can become ill again.

Is there a risk for pregnant women?

It's not known whether an infection during pregnancy can cause harm to the fetus. It's best to check with your OB-GYN.

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