- Viruses / Communicable diseases

Key facts, prevention tips for HFMD

⊜ Alarming surge in cases across Malaysia underscore need for vigilance, preventative measures including good hygiene

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A Schildren return to school after their holidays, parents and caregivers should remain extra cautious as the recent surge in hand, foot and mouth disease (HFMD) cases reported nationwide underscores the importance of remaining vigilant of the warning signs associated with the illness.



Though it is common during this time of the year, the current scale of transmission is alarming, necessitating heightened awareness and preventive measures. There is a rise in hospital referrals, concerned parental inquiries and requests for guidance from preschools and kindergartens on outbreak management.

Understanding HFMD

HFMD is a highly contagious viral infection predominantly affecting children under five. The illness typically presents with:

→ Fever
→ Sore throat
→ Reduced appetite
→ Painful oral ulcers
→ Rash on the hands, feet and occasionally buttocks

Most cases are mild, with recovery within seven to 10 days. However, a small number of cases, usually linked to the EV71 virus strain, may lead to complications such as:

→ Viral meningitis
→ Encephalitis (brain inflammation) → Cardiopulmonary complications

The good news is that these complications remain very rare.

Current outbreak situation

According to the Health Ministry, HFMD cases saw a 266% increase in infections compared to the same period last year.

The number of HFMD cases in Malaysia has risen to 99,601 as of the 17th epidemiological week this year, compared to 27,236 cases during the same period last year. No fatalities were reported linked

to the disease.
The ministry said 10,421 cases this year or 10% were outbreak-related, while 90% or 89,180 cases occurred sporadically.
Prevention tips for parents, schools
Since there is no specific treatment for HFMD, prevention and comfort care are essential. The measures to be taken into consideration are:
1. Keep sick children at home
→ Children with HFMD should remain at home until all blisters have dried and they are fever-free for at least 24 hours.
→ This is the most effective way to stop the virus from spreading.
→ Handwashing is critical.
2. Practice good hygiene
→ Teach children to wash their hands thoroughly with soap, especially after using the toilet and before eating.
→ Disinfect toys and surfaces regularly with chlorine-based or antiviral disinfectants.
3. Avoid high-risk areas during outbreaks
→ Temporarily limit visits to playgrounds, childcare centres or crowded spaces during outbreaks where transmissions are more likely. → Avoid sharing utensils, towels or personal items.
4. Provide comfort infected children
→ Offer soft foods, cool drinks and administer paracetamol if needed for fever or pain. care
Seeking medical attention
for
Most children recover without complications, but consulting a doctor is paramount if the child exhibits symptoms such as:
→ Refusal to eat or drink (risk of dehydration)
→ High fever (above 39°C) lasting more than two days
→ Lethargy, irritability or altered consciousness
Severe cases may require hospitalisation for intravenous hydration, antipyretics and close neurological monitoring.
Curbing HFMD outbreak is shared responsibility
The recent rise in cases across Selangor, Johor, Perak and other states is a reminder that we must remain vigilant – not just in hospitals, but as a community.
We are monitoring the situation closely. Paediatric teams, nurses and the infection control unit are working hand-in-hand to support parents and manage cases safely and efficiently.
By staying informed and adopting preventive measures, we can collectively reduce transmission and safeguard our children's health.
This article is contributed by Sunway Medical Centre paediatric infectious disease consultant Dr Ch'ng Tong Wei.