



Coxsackie Virus

(PUBLIC HANDOUT)

What is Coxsackie Virus?

Hand, foot and mouth disease is a viral infection caused by a strain of Coxsackie virus. It causes a blister-like rash that affects the hands, feet and mouth. (Hand, foot and mouth disease is different than foot-and-mouth disease, which is an infection of cattle, pigs, sheep, goats and deer and is caused by a different virus.)

Who gets Coxsackie Virus?

Usually this occurs in children under 10 years old, but occasionally can occur in young adults.

How is Coxsackie Virus spread?

Coxsackie Viruses can be passed from person to person. This usually happens by unwashed hands and surfaces contaminated by feces. The viruses can also be spread through the air when someone sneezes or coughs.

The duration of Coxsackie Virus infection varies widely. For Coxsackie fever without other symptoms, a child's temperature may return to normal within 24 hours, although the average fever lasts 3 to 4 days. Hand, foot, and mouth disease usually lasts for 2 or 3 days, while viral meningitis can take 3 to 7 days to clear up.

What are the signs and symptoms of Coxsackie Virus?

The most common symptoms:

- High Fever
- Headache
- Muscle aches
- Neck stiffness
- Sore throat
- Abdominal discomfort
- Nausea

Coxsackie Virus can also cause several different symptoms that affect different body parts, including:

- **Hand, foot, and mouth disease**, a type of Coxsackie Virus syndrome, causes painful red blisters in the throat and on the tongue, gums, hard palate, inside of the cheeks, and the palms of hands and soles of the feet.
- **Herpangina**, an infection of the throat which causes red-ringed blisters and ulcers on the tonsils and soft palate, the fleshy back portion of the roof of the mouth.



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- **Hemorrhagic conjunctivitis**, an infection that affects the whites of the eyes. Hemorrhagic conjunctivitis usually begins as eye pain, followed quickly by red, watery eyes with swelling, light sensitivity, and blurred vision.

Occasionally, Coxsackie Viruses cause more serious infections that may need to be treated in a hospital, including:

- **Viral Meningitis**, an infection where the tissue that covers the brain and spinal cord become swollen.
- **Encephalitis**, a brain infection
- **Myocarditis**, an infection of the heart muscle

Are Coxsackie Viruses contagious?

Coxsackie Viruses are very contagious. The virus spreads easily in group settings such as schools, daycares, or summer camps. Those infected are most contagious the first week they're sick.

When and how long can someone spread the disease?

A person is contagious when the first symptoms appear and may continue until the blister-like skin lesions disappear. The virus has been known to be shed in the stool for up to several weeks.

How is it diagnosed?

The diagnosis is generally suspected on the appearance of blister-like rash on hands and feet and mouth in a child with a mild febrile illness. Although specific viral tests are available to confirm the diagnosis, they are rarely performed due to the expense and length of time needed to complete the tests.

How are Coxsackie Viruses treated?

- Depending on the type of infection and symptoms, the doctor may prescribe medications to make your child feel more comfortable.
- Antibiotics can't be used to fight a Coxsackie Virus infection because they only work against bacteria.
- Acetaminophen may be given to relieve any minor aches and pains.
- Most children with a simple Coxsackie Virus infection recover completely after a few days without needing any treatment.
- A child who has a fever without any other symptoms should rest in bed or play quietly indoors.

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- Offer plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration.
- If a fever lasts for more than 24 hours or if your child has any symptoms of a more serious Coxsackie Virus infection, call your doctor.

How can I reduce my chances of becoming infected?

Currently, there is no vaccine to prevent Coxsackie Virus infection. Keeping good personal hygiene can help reduce a person's chance of becoming infected. Some examples would be:

Washing your hands

Covering your mouth and nose when you sneeze

Avoid sharing personal items such as water bottles, eating utensils, etc.

If you are in contact with someone who has Coxsackie Virus infection, the most effective way of preventing the spread of the disease is to wash your hands thoroughly and often. When you are sick, stay home!