



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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For additional information contact:

Lisa LaPlante at (616) 632-7182 or Lisa.LaPlante@kentcountymi.gov

**Health Department Notes Uptick in
Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease**

GRAND RAPIDS – Reports from area health care providers and data from local emergency departments indicate a recent increase in illness consistent with Hand, Foot, and Mouth Disease (HFMD), especially among patients 5 years of age and younger. HFMD is caused by an extremely contagious virus and is quite common in children under the age of 10, though it can also occur in adults. Symptoms include fever, sore throat, rash, sores on fingers, palms and soles of feet, and blister-like sores in the mouth. HFMD is spread by coughing, sneezing, or coming into contact with bodily fluid such as saliva or fecal matter.

“Typically, we see cases of Hand, Foot, and Mouth Disease increase in August,” says Adam London, Administrative Health Officer for the Kent County Health Department. “We don’t know why there is an increase earlier this year, but we want people to be aware and proactive in avoiding HFMD. There is no vaccine to protect against it, but there are precautions you can take to prevent you or your family members from getting HFMD.” Wash hands often, preferably with soap and water, especially after changing diapers and using the bathroom. Cover your mouth and nose with tissue when sneezing or coughing, and throw away used tissues immediately. Clean and disinfect surfaces and soiled items, including toys, where germs may spread. If you know that someone has HFMD, avoid kissing, hugging, or sharing cups, forks, spoons, or food items that they have used. Since this infection is most common among children, parents and those who work in settings where children interact (daycare centers, libraries, play spaces) should be especially aware of these prevention measures and encourage children to follow them.

The onset of HFMD is a fever for a day or two, followed by painful sores that develop in the mouth. These usually appear as small red spots that blister, and later can become ulcers. These blisters can appear on the tongue, gums, and inside the cheeks. Some will also find a skin rash a few days after onset, with flat or raised red spots, some with blisters. The rash does not itch. A person with HFMD may have only the rash or the mouth sores. In some cases, three to seven days after fever onset, some will suffer from loss of appetite, nausea, and/or vomiting. The illness could last a week to 10 days. Treatment of symptoms includes non-aspirin pain relievers and fever reducers, and make sure the infected person gets lots of rest and non-citric fluids, as fever can cause dehydration. If you or your child have symptoms of this illness, contact your health care provider for more information on treatment.

(Please note: HFMD is sometimes confused with *foot-and-mouth disease* (sometimes called *hoof-and-mouth disease*), which is found in livestock. These viruses are not related: humans do not get the animal disease, and animals do not get the human disease.)

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KCHD has been in the business of providing health services to Kent County since 1931. The Health Department is home to nearly 260 employees including public health nurses, sanitarians, health educators, technicians, public health administrators, and specialized staff at the Kent County Animal Shelter. The Health Department operates one main clinic and four satellite clinics located in Wyoming, Kentwood, Rockford, and Grand Rapids. To learn more about KCHD services, visit www.accesskent.com/health.