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"treating the cause of your problem, not just the symptoms"

Hand, Foot, Mouth Disease

Although most people do not realize it, many children visit our office for the treatment of many different problems. A large number of children regularly experience headaches, neck pain, and back pain. This may be due to a traumatic fall or even just poor posture when watching, often too much, television. Regardless, it is my job to identify their problem, make a diagnosis, and perform the gentle chiropractic treatment required to correct their problem. If necessary, a referral to another health care practitioner may even be required.

Having children in my office definitely keeps the place lively. However, last week I had one little girl come to see me for a knee injury. She did not seem herself that day so I asked her mom what was up. She said that her daughter had "hand, foot, and mouth disease". As a chiropractor, this is not something I see often in my practice and it is not something that I treat. However, although rare, this disease has the potential to become very serious if just ignored.

What is hand, foot, and mouth disease?

Hand, foot, and mouth disease (HFMD) is a common illness of infants and children. It is characterized by fever, sores in the mouth, and a rash with blisters. HFMD begins with a mild fever, poor appetite, malaise ("feeling sick"), and frequently a sore throat. One or 2 days after the fever begins, painful sores develop in the mouth. They begin as small red spots that blister and then often become ulcers. They are usually located on the tongue, gums, and inside of the cheeks. The skin rash develops over 1 to 2 days with flat or raised red spots, some with blisters. The rash does not itch, and it is usually located on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet. It may also appear on the buttocks. A person with HFMD may have only the rash or the mouth ulcers.

Is HFMD serious?

HFMD is caused by viruses from the group called "enteroviruses" and is usually not serious. HFMD caused by the more common type of virus results in a mild disease and nearly all patients recover without medical treatment in 7 to 10 days. Complications are uncommon. Rarely, an infected patient may also develop *"aseptic" or viral meningitis*, in which the person has *fever, headache, stiff neck, or back pain*, and may need to be hospitalized for a few days. Another type of virus may also cause *viral meningitis* and,

rarely, more serious diseases, such as *encephalitis, or a poliomyelitis-like paralysis*. This encephalitis may be fatal. Cases of fatal encephalitis occurred during outbreaks of HFMD in Malaysia in 1997 and in Taiwan in 1998.

Is HFMD contagious?

Yes, HFMD is moderately contagious. Infection is spread from person to person by direct contact with nose and throat discharges, saliva, fluid from blisters, or the stool of infected persons. A person is most contagious during the first week of the illness and the usual period from infection to onset of symptoms ("incubation period") is 3 to 7 days. Fever is often the first symptom of HFMD.

Who is at risk for HFMD?

HFMD occurs mainly in children under 10 years old, but may also occur in adults too. Everyone is at risk of infection, but not everyone who is infected becomes ill. Infants, children, and adolescents are more likely to be susceptible to infection and illness from these viruses, because they are less likely than adults to have antibodies and be immune from previous exposures to them. Infection results in immunity to the specific virus, but a second episode may occur following infection with a different virus but of a similar group.

How is HFMD treated?

No specific treatment is available for this or other enterovirus infections. Symptomatic treatment is given to provide relief from fever, aches, or pain from the mouth ulcers. To be sure, have your medical doctor monitor your child if they are diagnosed with HFMD.