For Immediate Release

Stay home if you contract Hand, Foot & Mouth Disease and other advice to combat illness

MORGANTOWN, WV (Aug. 20, 2018) — Cases of the highly-contagious Hand, Foot and Mouth disease have cropped up recently, including in Morgantown.

Dr. Lee B. Smith, executive director and county health officer, emphasizes that people who contract this illness and have a fever and/or blisters should stay home to avoid spreading it.

“Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease is an easily communicated viral illness caused by enteroviruses,” Smith said. “It is easily spread by person-to-person contact with an infected person, as the virus is in body secretions. Therefore, coughs, sneezes, nasal discharges, saliva as well as fluid from blisters and stool are infectious.”

It can take three to six days before the appearance of symptoms, which typically include a fever and rash. “Unfortunately, even after the rash goes away, the person may still be able to infect others for a week or more as they continue to shed virus in their secretions. Some people, particularly adults, may be contagious to others without showing any signs or symptoms of the disease,” Smith said.

According to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (cdc.gov), Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease is a common illness that usually affects infants and children under the age of 5 years old, but also can be found in older children and adults. In addition to a fever, initial symptoms also can include reduced appetite, sore throat and overall malaise.

One or two days after the fever starts, the CDC states, painful sores called herpangina can develop in the mouth. They usually begin as small red spots, often in the back of the mouth, that blister and become painful. A skin rash on palms of the hands and soles of the feet also may develop over one or two days as flat red spots, sometimes with blisters. The rash may also appear on the knees, elbows, buttocks and/or genital area.
Some people, especially young children, may get dehydrated if they are not able to swallow enough liquids because of the painful mouth sores. This is an instance in which medical care should be sought.

Outbreaks of the disease in the United States are common in summer and fall. There are approximately 200,000 cases annually, Smith added.

“Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease isn’t the same as Hoof and Mouth Disease found in farm animals,” Smith said. “That illness does not cross from farm animals to humans, and humans with Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease cannot pass that infection to pets or other farm or household animals.”

Health care professionals may diagnose Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease by considering such factors as the patient’s age, sores and symptoms. In other cases, samples from the patient’s throat or feces may be collected and sent to a laboratory, according to the CDC.

There is no vaccine to prevent Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease nor is there a medication that specifically cures the illness. Instead, people with Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease can treat the symptoms. These include over-the-counter medications such as aspirin, although this should not be given to children. Mouthwash and sprays can also help numb mouth pain, according to the CDC.

Other treatment includes rest, plenty of fluids and, as mentioned before, isolation in an effort not to spread the illness.

Methods to prevent illness include frequent handwashing with soap and hot water, especially after changing diapers and going to the bathroom; cleaning and disinfecting frequently-touched surfaces as well as toys and other items; and avoiding close contact with anyone who has Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease. This includes hugging, touching and sharing cups and utensils.

“The disease may be very mild to debilitating,” Smith said. “Preventing dehydration and treating fevers are the foundation for improvement. Those who are unable to drink sufficient fluids or who are particularly ill may need to seek medical attention.”

For more information, check out the CDC’s website at cdc.gov/hand-foot-mouth/about/diagnosis.html. For more information on MCHD, check out monchd.org and follow us on Facebook and Twitter @WVMCHD for up-to-date information on health and safety.