

The flu and cold season is approaching so we want to give parents some preventive measures and awareness of symptoms concerning contagious illnesses.

### **Preventing Respiratory Illness**

Respiratory viruses, such as flu, rhinovirus, and enteroviruses, can cause mild to severe respiratory illness and become increasingly common during the fall and winter months.

These viruses can be found in respiratory secretions such as saliva, nasal mucus, or sputum. They spread from person to person when an infected person coughs or sneezes or by touching contaminated surfaces such as doorknobs or tabletops.

Symptoms may include fever, runny nose, sneezing, cough, wheezing, skin rash, mouth blisters, or body and muscle aches.

Anyone with symptoms of respiratory illness is encouraged to visit their medical care provider. Flu can be treated with an antiviral medication, but there is no specific treatment for rhinovirus or enterovirus. Many of these infections will be mild and self-limited, requiring only treatment of the symptoms. Some people with severe respiratory illness may need to be hospitalized and receive intensive supportive therapy.

Preventive measures include:

Wash your hands often with soap and water for 20 seconds. Hand sanitizer has limited effectiveness against some enteroviruses, so handwashing is the preferred prevention method when possible.

Avoid close contact with people who are sick, including sharing eating or drinking utensils. When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick too.

Stay home when you are sick. Stay home from work, school, and errands when you are sick. Keep sick children at home. You will help prevent others from catching the illness.

Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.

Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands. Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his eyes, nose, or mouth.

Disinfect frequently touched surfaces, such as toys and doorknobs, especially if someone is sick.

Practice other good health habits. Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious food.

### **Hand-Foot-and-Mouth Disease (Coxsackie A)**

Hand-foot-and-mouth disease is a common childhood illness caused by Coxsackie virus A16. In many people, infection with the virus causes mild or no symptoms. In others, infection may result in painful blisters in the mouth, on the gums and tongue, on the palms and fingers of the hand, or on the soles of the feet. The fluid in these blisters contains the virus, and symptoms may last for 7 to 10 days. The infection usually goes away without any serious complications.

Hand-foot-and-mouth disease can be spread when the virus present in the blisters is passed to another person. The virus can be passed through saliva from blisters in the mouth, through the fluid from blisters on the hands and feet, or through the infected person's feces or urine.

Exclusion of the ill person may not prevent additional cases since the virus may be excreted for weeks after the symptoms have disappeared. Also, some persons excreting the virus may have no symptoms. If there are no open wounds, weeping lesions, or fever, infected persons may return to regular routines.