

Hand, Foot, and Mouth Disease Outbreak Reported in St. Thomas Schools and Daycares

Officials urge parents and caregivers to monitor children for symptoms, practice good hygiene, and keep infected children at home as the highly contagious virus spreads among young children.

Health / **Published On February 21, 2025 04:24 PM /**

Staff Consortium **February 21, 2025**

Image not found or type unknown



The V.I. Department of Health has issued a public health alert following an outbreak of Hand, Foot, and Mouth Disease (HFMD), with 46 confirmed cases reported at schools and daycares across St. Thomas as of Friday.

HFMD is a common viral illness that primarily affects children under the age of five. It typically presents with fever, mouth sores, and a skin rash, particularly on the hands and feet. While most cases are mild and resolve within seven to ten days, the virus spreads easily in group settings such as schools and childcare centers.

The virus is transmitted through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person sneezes, coughs, or speaks. It can also spread via contaminated surfaces and direct contact with fluid from blisters or stool. Although complications from HFMD are rare, health officials are urging the public to take precautions to prevent further transmission.

Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion emphasized the importance of strict hygiene and symptom monitoring. “We are urging residents to take precautionary measures to stop the spread of this highly contagious virus,” she stated. “Parents and caregivers should be especially vigilant in practicing good hygiene, in monitoring their children for symptoms, and keeping them at home if they are ill.”

Encarnacion further advised that children showing symptoms should not attend school or daycare until they have been fever-free for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication and until any rash or blisters have dried.

In response to the outbreak, the Department of Health’s Epidemiology Division has deployed resources to affected schools and daycares. Health officials are conducting phone consultations and in-person visits to assess infection control measures and provide training on disease prevention.

Currently, there is no specific treatment for HFMD, as the infection generally resolves on its own. Supportive care includes:

- Ensuring adequate hydration by drinking plenty of fluids.
- Using over-the-counter pain relievers such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen to alleviate fever and discomfort.
- Applying soothing mouth rinses or sprays to ease sore throat pain.
- Getting sufficient rest to support the recovery process.

To limit the spread of HFMD, the VI Department of Health recommends the following precautions:

- Frequent handwashing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after diaper changes, using the toilet, or coughing and sneezing.
- Assisting young children in proper handwashing and keeping blisters clean.
- Avoiding touching the face, particularly the eyes, nose, and mouth, with unwashed hands.

- Regularly cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces and shared items, such as toys and doorknobs, using a bleach solution (1 gallon of water mixed with ¼ cup of bleach).
- Avoiding close contact, such as hugging and kissing, with infected individuals.

Despite the number of reported cases, school closures are not currently recommended. “The VI Department of Health is not recommending school closures for HFMD,” said Dr. Esther Ellis, Territorial Epidemiologist. “Instead, we recommend enhanced hand hygiene protocols and environmental cleaning efforts for all schools and childcare settings.”

The VI Department of Health continues to monitor the situation closely and will provide updates as necessary. Schools and childcare providers are encouraged to report new cases by emailing epi@doh.vi.gov.

Residents experiencing symptoms or seeking additional guidance should contact their healthcare provider for further assistance.