

PRESS RELEASE

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Ministry Of Health Monitoring Hand Foot And Mouth Disease Outbreak

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FOOT & MOUTH DISEASE

To ensure workplace safety and limit the spread of HFMD, the Ministry of Health and Social Development advises employers and employees to follow this checklist

For Employers	For Employees
✓ Promote Awareness: Educate employees about HFMD symptoms, transmission, and prevention strategies. ✓ Encourage Good Hygiene: Provide hand sanitizers, tissues, and disinfecting wipes in common areas. ✓ Implement Flexible Leave Policies: Allow parents to care for their sick child without fear of job loss. ✓ Enhance Cleaning Protocols: Disinfect high-touch surfaces such as doorknobs, shared desks, and break areas frequently. ✓ Support Remote Work: Where possible, allow affected employees to work from home until their child recovers. ✓ Communicate Clearly: Ensure employees know	✓ Practice Good Hygiene: Wash hands frequently and disinfect personal items brought to work. ✓ Limit Workplace Exposure: If possible, opt for remote work or take necessary precautions when in the office. ✓ Avoid Sharing Items: Do not share personal office supplies, utensils, or food with coworkers. ✓ Monitor Symptoms: If you start experiencing symptoms, seek medical advice and avoid close contact with others. ✓ Follow Childcare Guidelines: Keep your child home from daycare or school until symptoms improve and blisters dry up. ✓ If You Have Symptoms, Stay Home: Employees who develop HFMD symptoms should not attend work to prevent further spread.

The Ministry of Health and Social Development has reported that there are twenty confirmed cases of Hand Foot and Mouth Disease (HFMD) in the Virgin Islands.

Acting Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Ronald Georges has confirmed that the cases were recorded from February 12 to February 27, and that the ministry is closely monitoring this development. He explained that these figures are likely to represent underreporting as many mild cases may not be reaching medical attention.

“With this in mind to reduce the potential for further spread, employers and employees are advised to take necessary precautions to prevent transmission in workplaces, childcare facilities, and households,” Dr. Georges explained.

Hand Foot and Mouth Disease is caused by viruses from the Enterovirus group, most commonly Coxsackievirus. Symptoms typically include fever, sore throat, painful ulcers in the mouth, skin rash on hands feet or buttocks and a general feeling of discomfort and fatigue.

According to Dr. Georges, the virus spreads through direct contact with an infected person's saliva, nasal secretions, blister fluids, and fecal matter. It is particularly common in daycare settings, schools, and other environments where children interact closely.

To minimise the risk of contracting and spreading the disease, the Ministry of Health and Social Development advises the public to:

- **Practice Frequent Handwashing** – Wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after using the toilet, changing diapers, and before eating.
- **Disinfect Surfaces and Personal Items** – Regularly clean and sanitise toys, doorknobs, countertops, and other high-touch surfaces.
- **Avoid Close Contact with Infected Individuals** – Refrain from kissing, hugging, and sharing utensils or food with anyone exhibiting symptoms.
- **Encourage Proper Coughing and Sneezing Etiquette** – Cover the mouth and nose with a tissue or elbow when sneezing or coughing to prevent the

spread of droplets.

- **Keep Infected Individuals Home** – Children and adults with symptoms should remain at home until fever subsides and blisters dry up to prevent further spread.
- **Maintain Good Hygiene in Public Spaces** – Parents, caregivers, and school officials should implement strict hygiene measures in schools and childcare facilities.

The Acting Chief Medical Officer stated that the Environmental Health Division will continue to work closely with Daycares and Preschools to ensure proper hygiene measures are implemented to prevent further spread. The division has inspected 85% of daycares and preschools within the Territory thus far for 2025.

Dr. Georges said the Hand Foot and Mouth Disease is generally a mild illness and that vigilance and adherence to hygiene is key in reducing transmission. He said the ministry remains committed to safeguarding public health and urges residents to stay informed and take precautionary steps. Physicians and health care professionals are also reminded of their responsibility to report all cases seen in their practices to the Ministry of Health and Social Development Public Health Unit.

The Ministry of Health and Social Development is committed to improving the health of the people of the Virgin Islands.