

PRESS RELEASE

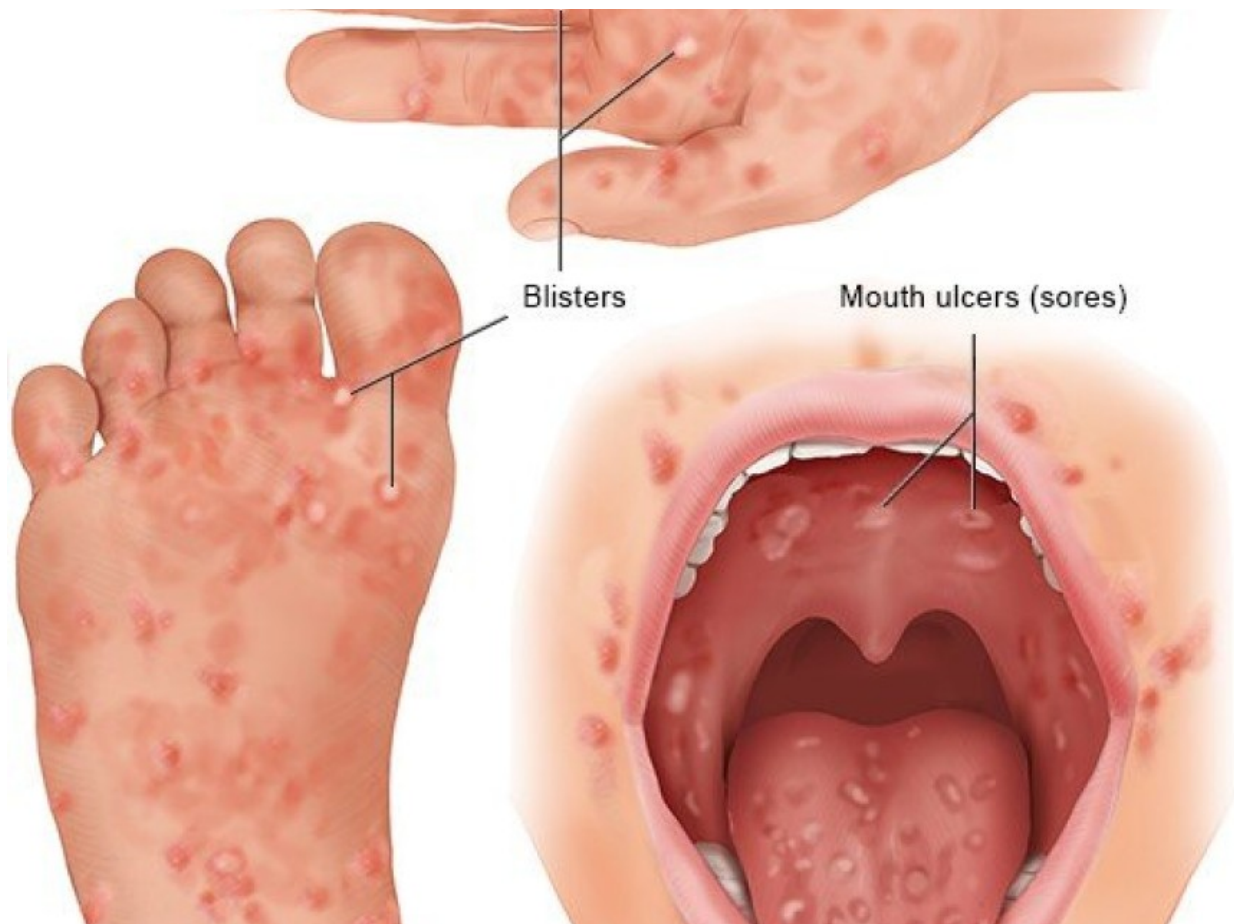
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Hand Foot And Mouth Cases Rising- 66 Cases Recorded

Release Date: 20 March, 2025



The Ministry of Health and Social Development has announced that the numbers of Hand Foot and Mouth Disease (HFMD) in the Virgin Islands has risen to 66 and is encouraging the community to take proactive measures to stop its spread.

Acting Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Ronald Georges confirmed that there is a rise in confirmed cases of the disease that is primarily affecting children across early childhood learning centres and pre-primary schools.

Dr. Georges said, "To mitigate spread, the Public Health Unit has implemented several key interventions such as enhanced surveillance, an increase in health inspections, public awareness and support for daycares and schools."

Parents and caregivers are reminded that the disease is a highly contagious viral illness spread through direct contact with an infected person's saliva, respiratory droplets, blister fluid, or stool. It can also spread by touching contaminated surfaces or objects such as toys, doorknobs, and shared utensils. Symptoms typically include fever, sore throat, painful ulcers in the mouth, skin rash on hands feet or buttock, decreased appetite, irritability, and a general feeling of discomfort and fatigue.

"Parents and caregivers are urged to be vigilant and take necessary precautions to prevent the spread by adhering to the guidance offered by public health," Dr. Georges advised.

Preventative Steps for Parents and Caregivers:

1. **Practice Good Hygiene:** Encourage children and adults to wash hands frequently with soap and water, especially after using the bathroom and before eating.
2. **Avoid Close Contact:** If a child is showing symptoms, keep them at home to reduce the risk of spreading the virus to others. Early childhood centers (daycares and nurseries) must also enforce their sick policies.
3. **Clean and Disinfect Surfaces:** Regularly clean toys, shared surfaces, and other frequently touched areas with disinfectant, particularly in daycare or school settings.

4. **Limit Sharing Items:** Discourage the sharing of eating utensils, cups, towels, and other personal items that could spread the virus.
5. **Have transparent communication:** Early childhood centers should immediately inform parents of a case. This reduces anxiety and builds trust. It also allows parents to monitor their children. Parents should also inform centers, so they can thoroughly clean and sanitize preventing spread.
6. **Monitor for Symptoms:** Parents should monitor children for early symptoms of HFMD, especially if they've been in close contact with someone who is ill.
7. **Seek Medical Attention:** If you notice the above symptoms, especially the appearance of the rash, please see your physician.

The Chief Medical Officer is imploring the public to take the outbreak seriously and parents to follow their physician's advice and keep infected children at home for the recommended time (**7-10 days**). Daycares are also asked to strictly enforce sick policies by not allowing symptomatic children to attend and ensure thorough cleaning and disinfection of shared spaces and toys.

Daycares and health-care providers are reminded to report cases of the disease to the Ministry of Health via email at phu@gov.vg or via phone at 284-468-2285/2279/2572.

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