Outbreak of hand, foot and mouth disease in Asia

06 May 2008

Health authorities in Singapore, China and Vietnam are tackling several thousand cases of hand, foot and mouth disease (HFMD), with at least 26 fatalities reported in China. Infants and young children are most affected, which is as expected.

These outbreaks of HFMD are caused by enterovirus 71 (EV71), an intestinal virus found worldwide. Such outbreaks frequently last months and can spread widely. The virus is mainly transmitted through direct contact with cases.

HFMD is a common illness in children, and is usually mild, starting with fever, followed by a sore throat with sores on the tongue, gums and cheeks, and skin rash on the palms of the hands and the soles of the feet. EV71 may, however, cause severe neurological disease, including meningitis and encephalitis, which may result in death. There is currently no vaccine or curative treatment for cases. There are, however, effective public health measures to prevent the spread of the disease, such as sanitation and general hygiene.

Cases are currently being reported from six provinces in China: Anhui (the most affected), Zhejiang, Henan, Hubei, Jiangxi and Guangdong. Singapore and Vietnam are also experiencing outbreaks, but for Vietnam no further details are available on the geographical spread.

Anyone traveling to an affected area should observe strict personal hygiene measures to avoid infection. Please see our factsheet on EV71 for more information.

ECDC, in collaboration with the European Commission, is closely following the situation, and will provide additional information and analysis as needed.

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