

PRESS RELEASE

HAND-FOOT-MOUTH DISEASE

24th February, 2006

Sarawak Health Department would like to inform the public that there has been an increase in the number of reported Hand-Foot-Mouth Disease (HFMD) cases in Sarawak since early January 2006. Most of the reported cases were from Kuching, Sibu and Bintulu Divisions.

HFMD is a common viral infection caused mainly by the enterovirus group of viruses. These viruses are common all over the world, including Malaysia. Children below the age of five years are more prone than adults to suffer from HFMD.

Since the 1997 HFMD outbreak, Sarawak Health Department in collaboration with the Institute of Health and Community Medicine (IHCM) University Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) has been conducting surveillance of HFMD in the State. From this surveillance system it is known that HFMD occurs in the State every year. Of all the specimens sent in 2006 to IHCM as part of this surveillance system, the percentage positive for **enterovirus EV71** for Sibu and Kuching are 58% and 52% respectively.

As of 23rd February 2006, the total number of reported cases in Sarawak is exceeding 850 compared to 73 over the same period in 2005. The number of cases reported from Sibu was 436 during the period 1st January 2006 to 23rd February 2006 compared to 80 cases over the same period last year. In Kuching, there were 118 cases (2006) compared to 41 cases (2005). For Bintulu there were 211 cases (2006) compared to 13 cases (2005). In other parts of the State, no sharp increase in cases has been noted.

Based on the current available surveillance data, the HFMD in the State this year is due to **EV71**. As such the current HFMD situation in the State may be potentially more severe compared to the Hand-Foot-Mouth disease caused by other enteroviruses such as coxsackie A16 virus. In order to minimize the spread and severity of the HFMD as well as to reduce mortalities among young children in the State, drastic measures are being taken. Closure of premises such as childcare centres will be effected whenever necessary.

There were three deaths associated with Hand-Foot-Mouth disease since December 2005. Laboratory results from IHCM UNIMAS showed a sample from one of the three deaths was positive for enterovirus 71 (EV71). Samples from the other two children who died were negative for EV71.

Mode of transmission of HFMD is:

1. Can spread from human to human
2. Main method of spread is by;
 - a. Direct contact with people having the illness
 - b. Hand to mouth
 - c. Inhalation of droplets spread by coughing and sneezing,

Sarawak Health Department would like to advise members of the general public, especially those having young children, to take the following precautions to reduce their risk of getting infected:

1. Avoid all crowded places such as shopping centers, cinemas, swimming pool, etc
2. Observe strict personal hygiene
3. Wash hand thoroughly before eating, handling/preparing food and touching/handling small children
4. Ensure cleanliness in their homes and cleanliness of children's toys/used items

In addition to the above measures, parents of children with HFMD are advised not to send them to kindergartens, nurseries or play schools while they are ill to help reduce the spread of the disease. They are also advised to bring their children for early medical attention. If the child does not appear to be getting better or is getting more ill, parents are advised to bring the child back to their own doctor or to the nearest hospital for further medical examination and treatment.

Thus the Sarawak Health Department would like to advise the public to do the following:

1. Wash hands with soap and clean water after using the toilet, before preparing food, after changing diaper and washing faeces of children.
2. Cover the mouth and nose when coughing and sneezing.
3. Maintain cleanliness of house, child care centres, kindergartens or school surrounding.
4. Wash all toys and surfaces of tables, chairs, floors and so on that have been contaminated with saliva.
5. Bring children to the nearest clinic or hospital if they have the signs and symptoms of infection.
6. Parents are advised not to bring young children to crowded public places such as swimming pools, markets, bus station, etc.
7. Children who show signs and symptoms of infection;
 - a) Should refrain from going to childcare center and kindergarten or school and should be brought to clinic immediately for investigation.
 - b) Do not burst the blister.
 - c) Wash hands if dressing the blisters and emptying bowel.
 - d) Use a separate set of eating utensils.

Additional Information on HFMD

1. Agent of infection;

- a. It is a disease caused by viruses from enterovirus group specifically from EV71 and Coxsackie group A16.

2. Clinical Signs and Symptoms.

- a. The signs and symptoms of the infection are fever, sore throat, loss of appetite, ulcer at the throat and mouth as well as blister rashes on the hands, feet and diaper area (papulovesicular lesions).
- b. It affects mostly children below 10 years of age. Duration of infection normally lasts 7 to 10 days.

3. Mode of Spread.

HFMD is spread by;

- a. Direct contact with droplets from infected person through coughing and sneezing, or oral secretion and nasal discharge, or through contaminated hands to mouth.
- b. Touching blister on the body of an infected person.

4. Incubation period.

- a. A person will show signs and symptoms 3 to 7 days after exposure to the virus. Most patients will recover within a few days.

5. Period of Infection.

- a. It is very infectious at the acute stage especially from the cough and sneeze droplets, oral and nasal discharge and fluid from the blisters.
- b. The viruses may continue to be excreted in the stool of the infected persons for a few weeks.