

Double epidemic whammy

But cases of HFMD and flu remain mild: MOH

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SINGAPORE – Three infectious diseases are hovering around epidemic levels here, and the Ministry of Health (MOH) is reminding the public to practise good personal hygiene to contain infection levels.

Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease (HFMD) and acute respiratory infection – caused mainly by flu viruses – hit epidemic levels last week, while diarrhoeal illness (or stomach flu) rates were just below the epidemic threshold.

There were 819 cases of HFMD reported last week, the fifth straight week the epidemic threshold of 679 cases was breached. So far this year, 16,222 HFMD cases have been reported. But an MOH spokesperson said despite the high number of cases, the disease remains mild and there has not been any case of severe complications so far.

Most of the acute respiratory infection cases are also mild and self-limiting, said the spokesperson. Flu viruses are the most important cause, but the ministry's surveillance has not found "any significant rise in influenza activity in recent weeks".

As for stomach flu, MOH said a variety of infectious and non-infectious causes could be behind the 2,464 cases seen at polyclinics last week. Although this number is lower than the week before, it is still above the warning level of 2,391 cases. MOH has not identified any large outbreak or other contributing factors to the increased incidence of the illness.

MOH advised the public not to go to school or work when ill. They are also urged to wash their hands frequently, especially before food preparation and meals.

Those in high-risk groups like the elderly and young children should also get relevant vaccinations, MOH said.

But not everyone has been acting responsibly. Mr Isaac, a father of three, said his children contracted HFMD two weeks ago. His son had contracted the disease from another boy at the Choa Chu Kang childcare centre they attend.

"The childcare centre sent out letters reminding parents to be vigilant, and I heard from my mum that they did a thorough clean-up," said Mr Isaac, who declined to give his surname. His children, aged one-and-a-half to four, have since recovered, but he remains worried about a recurrence.

"Hygiene is the most important thing. When it hits, it's too late," he said.