

KEEP IT CLEAN - TO COMBAT HFMD, SAYS HINCHCLIFFE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Just as we thought we had the H1N1 virus also known as swine flu under control, there are reports of hand, foot and mouth disease (HFMD), “a highly contagious viral infection,” that primarily affects children under 10 years old.

According to local news reports, the disease was detected at a preparatory school in St. Andrew recently and steps are now being taken by the government to have officials inspect all kindergarten, preparatory and primary schools to ensure that proper measures are in place for hygiene and sanitation.

At the same time it is advisable that the necessary precautions be taken nationwide, particularly in those institutions that cater to children, to ensure that the environment is thoroughly cleaned. But what does it mean to really “keep the environment clean?” In cases like these, is sweeping and mopping enough?

According to cleaning and sanitation experts Manpower and Maintenance Services Limited, “Cleaning areas that have been contaminated, as in this case, requires more than mop and broom.” It requires detailed cleaning with soap, water and disinfectant applied to all surfaces such as switch-plates, doorknobs, desks, chairs, counters, shelves, cupboards, walls, floors and in fact any area that may be subject to human contact.

Chief Executive Officer of Manpower and Maintenance Services Limited and health specialist Audrey Hinchcliffe, recommends that institutions such as schools, daycare centres, nurseries as well as others that can be classified as “high traffic areas” should be carefully cleaned “particularly when they are empty so that the job can be thoroughly done.” She also recommends the following:

- Ensure that cleaning and disinfecting is done by cleaners or school custodians who are trained in the proper techniques.
- Clean and disinfect all surfaces with bleach and/or a readily available commercial product approved by the Ministry of Health. The suggested ratio is a 1/4 cup of bleach to one gallon of water.

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- Ensure that toys, cribs, sleeping or exercise mats and teaching / learning aids such as building blocks are properly washed.
- Don't forget to remove or treat charts and other hangings on the walls of schools and daycare centres during cleaning.
- Clean rails and grilles that are frequently touched.
- Care givers should ensure that soiled diapers are properly disposed of and both children and adults are encouraged to wash hands frequently.
- Discourage the sharing of utensils and toys.
- Limit bodily contact with infected persons.

According to Hinchcliffe, "A really clean environment and hands thoroughly washed with soap and water are the best known ways to control this disease."

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