

Fifth Disease (Erythema Infectiosum)

What is it?

Fifth Disease is a mild viral disease caused by human parvovirus B19. It is sometimes called "slapped cheek syndrome".

What are the symptoms?

Fifth Disease often begins with mild respiratory symptoms and may include a fever. There is usually a rash that causes bright red cheeks, which gives a "slapped cheek" appearance. A lace-like rash on the body, arms and legs may also be seen. The rash fades, but may recur for weeks when exposed to sunlight or heat.

Who is at risk?

Everyone is at risk of getting Fifth Disease, but it occurs more commonly in children. Most adults have been exposed in childhood and have immunity. Individuals suffering from anemia, immunodeficiency, and pregnant women may have a greater risk of complications from the disease. Pregnant women who are immune are protected from getting the illness and therefore provide protection to the fetus.

When do symptoms start?

The symptoms can start anywhere from four to 20 days after coming into contact with the virus. It may take two to three weeks for the rash to develop.

When is it contagious?

Fifth disease is most infectious before the rash even develops, and usually is not contagious once the rash has appeared. When a person is infected with the virus they develop immunity which protect them against Fifth Disease in the future.

How is it spread?

Fifth Disease is spread from person to person through saliva, sneezing and coughing. Fifth Disease occurs most often during winter and spring months. Outbreaks frequently occur in children in elementary schools and daycares.

How is it treated?

Fifth Disease is caused by a virus. There is no treatment.

How can it be prevented?

- Cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze and encourage others to do the same.
- Use good hand hygiene after handling nose and throat discharges (i.e., after disposal of facial tissues containing nose discharges).
- Avoid sharing eating utensils.
- Reduce person-to-person contact with those who have symptoms.
- Those with chronic anemia or immunodeficiencies and pregnant women who have continued exposure should see a health care provider.

What do I do if I get sick with Fifth Disease?

- If your child has signs and symptoms of a respiratory illness he/she should be kept out of daycare/school until symptom free.
- Exclusion of individuals with Fifth Disease from school or daycare is not recommended as they are no longer contagious once the rash appears.
- Pregnant women who are unsure of their immune status should see their health care provider if they are exposed to a confirmed case of Fifth Disease