

Fifth Disease

What is Fifth Disease?

Fifth disease is sometimes called “slapped cheek” syndrome because of the red rash it causes. It is an infection of the airway and lungs. Parvovirus B19 causes fifth disease. It is most common in late winter and early spring.

Fifth Disease and Pregnancy

There is a very small risk that an unborn child can develop anemia before birth. If you are pregnant you can have a blood test to determine whether you had fifth disease in the past. If you did, you would be immune to it now.

Fifth disease can also be dangerous to people who are having chemotherapy treatment.

What are the symptoms of Fifth Disease?

- There may be no symptoms or only mild symptoms. Fifth disease begins with a low-grade fever (102°F or 38.9°C), headache and mild cold-like symptoms (a stuffy or runny nose). There may also be stomach upset (nausea and diarrhea).
- It starts as a very red rash on the cheeks that looks like the face has been slapped.
- After 1 to 4 days a red, lace-like rash appears, first on the trunk and arms and then on the rest of the body.

The rash may last from 1 to 3 weeks. During that time, the rash may come and go. It can be worse with changes in temperature, exposure to sunlight and exercise.

How does Fifth Disease spread?

The virus spreads the same as a cold virus:

- By touching the hands of someone who has the infection and then putting your hands in your mouth;
- By touching an object (such as a toy) that has been touched by someone who has the infection and then putting your hands in your mouth;
- By coming in contact with the virus in the air after an infected person has coughed or sneezed.

The virus is most contagious a few days before the rash starts. Once the rash appears, your child can no longer pass it to anyone else.

How can Fifth Disease be prevented?

Since there is no vaccination against parvovirus, you can reduce your chance of being infected or infecting others by:

- Washing your hands often with soap and water for at least 15 seconds
- Covering your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze
- Not touching your eyes, nose, or mouth
- Avoiding close contact with people who are sick
- Staying home when you are sick.

This fact sheet provides basic information only. It must not take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always talk to a health care professional about any health concerns.

For further information contact the Infectious Disease Program at
625-8318 or toll free 1-888-294-6630 ex. 8318

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