

Fifth Disease

Date:

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Your child may have been exposed to **fifth disease (also called erythema infectiosum)** while at child care.

What is fifth disease?

Fifth disease is a mild rash illness caused by a virus called human parvovirus B19. Outbreaks of fifth disease occur often in child care settings and schools.

What are the symptoms of fifth disease?

An ill child usually has bright red cheeks (“slapped-cheek rash”) for the first couple of days, followed by a “lacy” red rash on the arms, legs, and trunk. Less commonly, a child may have an itchy “gloves and socks” rash. The rash usually gets better in 7 to 10 days, but may come and go for days or even weeks. Cold symptoms or a slight fever may be present before the rash appears. Adults with fifth disease may experience joint pain along with the rash. Some children and adults who are infected with the virus do not have any symptoms.

How serious is fifth disease?

Fifth disease is usually mild and goes away on its own. For people with weakened immune systems or sickle cell anemia and other inherited blood disorders, however, fifth disease can be more serious and a health care provider should be consulted. Fifth disease may also cause problems for the fetus during pregnancy. Pregnant women exposed to fifth disease should contact their health care provider.

How does a person get fifth disease?

The virus that causes fifth disease is found in respiratory secretions (fluids from the nose, mouth, and throat). The virus is spread when a person comes into direct contact with those fluids from an infected person.

How long does it take to come down with fifth disease after a person is exposed?

It generally takes from 4 to 14 days from the time a person is infected for symptoms to begin.

When is a person with fifth disease contagious?

People with fifth disease are contagious before the rash appears. Those with a rash are not contagious.

How can I help prevent the spread of fifth disease?

- Wash hands well and often with soap and water, especially after wiping a nose or mouth.
- Cover coughs and sneezes and put used tissues into a trash can.
- Clean, rinse, and sanitize toys regularly at child care and after contact with saliva.
- Prevent sharing of food, drinks, and personal items that may touch the mouth, such as eating utensils, toothbrushes, or towels.
- Keep your child home when s/he has a fever.

What is the treatment for fifth disease?

Usually, symptom relief (that is, relief of any fever, pain, or itching) is the only treatment needed for fifth disease.

If my child develops fifth disease, must s/he stay away from child care?

No, as long as s/he does not have any other symptoms that would require exclusion.

