

Fifth Disease

Dear Parent or Guardian,

You are being provided with this fact sheet:

☐ **because you or your child may have been exposed to fifth disease.** If you believe your child has fifth disease, contact your medical provider. Notify your child care provider, school, or preschool immediately after the diagnosis has been made.

☐ **for informational purposes only.**

What is fifth disease?

Fifth disease is a mild illness caused by parvovirus B19. It is also known as "slapped cheek disease" or erythema infectiosum. It occurs most commonly in children.

What are the symptoms of fifth disease?

Fifth disease may begin with a mild fever*, malaise, or cold-like symptoms. A few days later a bright red rash appears on the cheeks that make them appear to have been "slapped." The rash spreads and red blotches (usually lighter in color) extend down to the trunk, arms, and legs. As the centers of the blotches begin to clear, the rash takes on a lacy net-like appearance. The rash may be accompanied by itching. The rash usually resolves in 7 to 10 days, but may recur for 1 to 3 weeks upon exposure to heat or sunlight. Adults who get fifth disease may develop the typical rash seen in children as well as joint pain and swelling. Symptoms usually appear 4 to 14 days (sometimes up to 21 days) after exposure. About 20% of children and adults who get infected with this virus will not have any symptoms.

How is fifth disease spread?

Fifth disease most easily spread from person-to-person during the early part of the illness when the illness appears to be 'just a cold.' Infection may develop after exposure to respiratory secretions such as saliva or mucus from an infected person when they cough or sneeze. Objects such as used tissues, mouthed toys, drinking cups, and utensils can spread the virus. Once the characteristic "slapped cheek" rash appears, a person is no longer contagious. The virus only infects humans. Animal parvoviruses are different, so cats and dogs cannot spread fifth disease.

Who is at risk for fifth disease?

Although anyone who has not had fifth disease can become ill, the disease is most common in children. About 50% to 80% of adults are immune. Most people who get fifth disease are not very ill and recover fully. Some individuals with sickle-cell disease, chronic anemia, or immune system deficiencies may become seriously ill and require medical attention.

Pregnant women should consult their health care provider. Usually there are no serious complications for a pregnant woman or her baby as a result of exposure to fifth disease. Most pregnant women who do become ill with fifth disease have only a mild illness and there are no adverse effects on the fetus. Occasionally severe anemia can occur in the unborn baby, which may result in a miscarriage. Miscarriage occurs in less than 5% of all pregnant women infected with fifth disease and is most common during the first half of pregnancy.

* Fever is defined as: temperature of 101°F (38.3°C) or higher.

Child Care Health Program

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Adapted from the Snohomish Health District

How is fifth disease diagnosed?

A health care provider usually makes a diagnosis of fifth disease based on the symptoms. A blood test for the virus antibody is also available.

How is fifth disease treated?

Fifth disease is usually a mild illness that resolves on its own among children and adults who are otherwise healthy. Most people with fifth disease require only general comfort measures to help ease the symptoms. Pregnant women or patients with anemia or immune deficiencies may require specialized treatment.

How can the spread of fifth disease be reduced?

- Use good handwashing techniques often.
- Avoid sharing personal articles that may be contaminated with saliva, such as drinking cups, eating utensils and mouthed toys.
- Use a sanitizing solution on toys and surfaces.
- Dispose of facial tissues properly. Teach children to cover their mouth and nose with a tissue, or their upper sleeve when they cough or sneeze.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Avoid close contact with people who are ill.

Exclude from group setting?

Excluding a child diagnosed with fifth disease from school or child care is not necessary because the child is no longer contagious once the rash appears.

Reference:

American Academy of Pediatrics

- Managing Infectious Diseases in Child Care and Schools, 5th Edition. Pages 93-94

Centers for Disease Control & Prevention

Parvovirus B19 and Fifth Disease. Website

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