

Fact Sheet: Fifth Disease

What is Fifth Disease?

Fifth Disease is caused by a virus known as parvovirus B19. It is a common childhood disease.

What are the symptoms?

- Fever
- Headache
- Runny nose
- Bright red rash on the cheeks (“slapped cheek” rash) followed by a fine lacy rash over the rest of the body that may itch. The rash may last for 7 to 10 days. After exposure to sunlight or heat, the rash may reappear for 1-3 weeks. Other symptoms are usually gone by the time the rash appears.
- Adults may have joint pain and swelling which usually lasts a few days.

Symptoms begin from 4-20 days after exposure.

How is it spread?

The virus of Fifth Disease is spread mostly by respiratory droplets. This means when an infected person coughs or sneezes, the virus can spread to another person who is close by. Once the rash is present, the person is usually no longer infectious. The virus can also be spread via blood products. A pregnant woman who is infected with the virus can pass it to her baby.

How is it treated?

Fifth Disease is usually mild and resolves on its own. There is no specific treatment for this disease because it is caused by a virus, but symptoms can be reduced by the following:

- Treat fevers with non-aspirin products (acetaminophen, ibuprofen).
- Get plenty of rest.
- Drink plenty of fluids such as water, fruit juice, and tea.

What are the serious complications of Fifth Disease?

People with impaired immune systems may become seriously ill and require medical care. Pregnant women (who have not previously had the illness) should avoid contact with persons who have Fifth Disease. The virus can infect the baby prior to birth and could cause the death of an unborn fetus during the first half of pregnancy.

How is it prevented?

- Use a tissue to catch sneezes and coughs and dispose of used tissues in the trash.
- Wash your hands frequently throughout the day, especially after using the bathroom and before cooking or eating. Teach your children to wash their hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Do NOT touch your eyes, nose, or mouth, especially if infected with the virus.
- If you are pregnant and think you have been exposed to Fifth Disease, call your doctor as soon as possible.
- There is no vaccine or medicine that can prevent parvovirus B19 infection.

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information contact your health care provider or visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov.

