



Fifth Disease Fact Sheet

(Erythema infectiosum, parvovirus B19 infections)

What is fifth disease?

Fifth disease is a mild rash illness caused by the human parvovirus B19. It usually infects children but recently has been shown to cause serious health problems during pregnancy.

Who gets fifth disease?

Anyone can get fifth disease, but it occurs most often in elementary school-age children.

How is the virus spread?

The virus is spread by respiratory secretions from infected people through coughing and sneezing. A person is most contagious when it seems like you have just a fever and/or cold. The virus can also be spread through blood or blood products and from pregnant mother to her baby.

What are the symptoms and when do they appear?

One to two weeks after infection, some children will have a low-grade fever and will feel tired. A red rash or “slapped face,” appearance generally appears on the cheeks. The rash may then spread to the rest of the body and may come and go. The rash may itch. Some children may have only vague signs of illness or none at all. Adults with fifth disease may not have a rash but arthritis may develop.

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How long is an infected person able to spread the disease?

People with fifth disease can spread the illness during the week before the rash appears. By the time the rash is seen, the virus is not likely to spread others.

How is fifth disease diagnosed?

The disease is usually diagnosed by the presence of the rash. A blood test can also be used.

What is the treatment for fifth disease?

Fifth disease is usually mild and will go away on its own. Children and adults who are otherwise healthy usually recover completely. Treatment usually involves relieving symptoms, such as fever, itching, and joint pain and swelling.

Can a person get fifth disease again?

People who have been infected before usually do not get fifth disease again.

Should infected people be excluded from school or work?

No. By the time the rash appears, the infected person is not likely to spread the virus.

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What are the health problems associated with fifth disease?

Because most women have already been infected, most pregnant women cannot be affected. Of the few pregnant women who do get infected, most will not have any problems. However, in very rare instances, the infection may increase the risk of miscarriage in the first half of pregnancy. In people with chronic red blood cell disorders, such as sickle-cell disease, this infection may result in severe anemia.

What can be done to stop the spread of fifth disease?

Everyone, especially those with cold or flu-like symptoms, should cover their mouth and nose when sneezing or coughing. During outbreaks in schools, pregnant employees and people with chronic red blood cell disorders should ask their doctor for advice before attending.

*For further information, contact the
Oklahoma City-County Health Department
(405) 425-4437*

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