

# Fifth Disease (Slapped Cheek Disease)



## What Is It?

Fifth disease is a mild rash, also called slapped cheek. It is caused by a virus called parvovirus B19. Outbreaks most often occur in winter and spring, but a person may become ill with fifth disease at any time of the year.

## What Are the Symptoms?

Symptoms begin with a mild fever and complaints of tiredness. After a few days, the cheeks take on a flushed appearance that looks like the face has been slapped. There may also be a soft, light rash on the chest, arms and legs. Not all infected persons develop a rash. As the rash appears, the child usually begins to feel better, and the fever resolves. The rash may last for over a week and may recur in response to sunlight or a warm bath. Most persons who get fifth disease are not very ill and recover without any serious consequences. However, children with sickle cell anemia, chronic anemia or a weak immune system may become seriously ill when infected with parvovirus B19 and require medical care.

## Who Gets It and How?

Children and adults can get the illness. The virus of fifth disease lives in the nose and throat and can be spread from person to person through coughing, sneezing, kissing on the lips, and sharing food, eating utensils and mouthed toys. Women who develop fifth disease during pregnancy may pass the infection to their unborn fetuses.

Fifth disease is contagious one to two weeks before the rash appears. Once the rash appears, a person is no longer contagious.

## When Should People with This Illness Be Excluded?

A child who has been diagnosed with fifth disease need not be excluded from child care.

## Is Fifth Disease a Problem for a Pregnant Woman?

If a pregnant woman becomes infected with fifth disease for the first time, there is a small risk (less than 10 percent) that the fetus may suffer damage, including the possibility of miscarriage or stillbirth. The woman

herself may have no symptoms or a mild illness with rash or joint pains. If pregnant women are exposed to fifth disease, they should consult their health provider.

## How Can I Limit the Spread of Fifth Disease?

- Make sure that all children and staff use good hand washing practices, especially after wiping or blowing noses; after contact with any nose, throat or eye secretions; and before preparing or eating food.
- Do not share food, pacifiers, bottles, toothbrushes, eating utensils or drinking cups.
- Clean and disinfect all mouthed toys and frequently used surfaces on a daily basis.
- Don't kiss children on the mouth.
- Play outdoors as much as possible.
- Avoid exposing pregnant women and people with blood disorders and immune problems.
- Make sure that the child care facility is well ventilated, either by opening windows or doors or using a ventilation system.
- Make sure that children are not crowded together, especially during naps on floor mats or cots.
- Teach children to cough and sneeze into their elbow and away from people.

If an outbreak of Fifth Disease occurs in the child care setting:

- Notify all parents and staff members. Pregnant women and parents of children who have a damaged immune system, sickle cell anemia or other blood disorders may want to consult their health care providers.
- Make sure that all children and adults use good hand washing techniques. See the Health and Safety Note, *The Hygiene Health Connection: Personal Hygiene Habits Which Reduce the Spread of Disease*.
- If you are pregnant, consult your health care provider.