

**What is fifth disease?**

Fifth disease is a mild rash illness that occurs most commonly in children. The illness is caused by the human parvovirus B19 and infects only humans. Fifth disease is also referred to as erythema infectiosum or “slapped cheek disease”.

**What are the symptoms of fifth disease?**

One to two weeks after exposure, some children will experience low-grade fever, tiredness, or “cold” like symptoms. These symptoms are then followed by a distinctive facial rash often referred to as “slapped cheeks”. The rash may then spread to the body and tends to fade and reappear. This rash may be lacy in appearance and itchy, and can last for a couple of weeks. Approximately 20% of infected children and adults do not have any symptoms. Teenagers and adults who are symptomatic typically lack the rash but may have temporary arthritis-like symptoms.

**How is fifth disease spread?**

Fifth disease is spread through respiratory secretions such as saliva, sputum or mucous of infected individuals. Persons with fifth disease usually spread the virus during the week before the rash appears. By the time the person develops the rash, the person is no longer spreading the virus.

**What are the complications associated with fifth disease?**

While most individuals infected with the virus experience a mild infection, some people may experience complications with the disease. In pregnant women, infection in the first trimester has been linked to spontaneous abortion. Also, individuals with Sickle-cell disease or weakened immune systems may experience severe anemia. These individuals should contact their health care provider if they have been exposed to fifth disease.

**Who gets fifth disease?**

Anyone can become infected with the virus, but the disease is most common in elementary school-aged children. Once a person has been infected, they develop immunity to the virus and will not be infected again. Approximately 50% of adults are immune because they have been infected with parvovirus B19 at an earlier time.

**How is fifth disease spread?**

Fifth disease is spread through respiratory secretions of infected individuals before the onset of rash. An exposed person usually becomes ill 4 to 14 days after being infected with the virus.

**How is fifth disease diagnosed?**

In most cases, a healthcare provider typically diagnoses fifth disease based on the characteristic symptoms. If necessary, a blood test can be done to confirm the diagnosis.

**What is the treatment for fifth disease?**

There is no specific treatment for fifth disease. However, your healthcare provider may treat the symptoms of fifth disease.

**What can be done to prevent the spread of fifth disease?**

There is no vaccine or medication that prevents parvovirus B19 infection. Good hand washing is recommended and may be a practical and effective method to reduce the spread of the virus. Because individuals spread the disease before they develop the rash, excluding individuals with rash-like symptoms from school or child care centers is not likely to prevent the spread of the virus. However, it may be beneficial to exclude children with fever from school or daycare.

