

FIFTH DISEASE FACT SHEET (SLAPPED-CHEEK DISEASE)

What is Fifth Disease?

Fifth Disease (Erythema Infectiosum) is typically a mild illness that is caused by a virus (parvo virus B19).

Who gets Fifth Disease?

School children are most commonly infected with fifth disease. Rarely, it can cause more severe illness in people with sickle cell anemia, immune problems and pregnancy. Those who are pregnant or having immune problems should consult their health provider immediately.

How is the virus spread?

Fifth disease is spread by direct contact with infected mucus from the nose or mouth or by inhaling droplets coughed or sneezed into the air.

When is it contagious?

Fifth disease is contagious from 1-3 days prior to the onset of the rash. Once the rash appears the disease is no longer contagious. After exposure to the contagious period of fifth disease it typically takes 2-3 weeks to develop the illness.

What are the symptoms of fifth disease?

Fifth disease usually begins with 3-4 days of low-grade fever and mild cold symptoms. This is followed in 7-10 days by the appearance of a bright red, raised rash, which covers the cheeks, making them look as if they had been slapped. After another 1-3 days a pink, lacy-like rash appears on the upper part of the arms and legs, spreading to the trunk, which lasts 5-10 days.

Once cleared it may reappear for several weeks or months if the skin becomes flushed from exercise, sunlight or a warm bath. Young adults can experience mild joint pains and swelling often without a rash. There is no permanent joint damage.

What is the treatment for fifth disease?

Generally no treatment is needed. If the rash is very itchy, some medication or lotion could be used to relieve the itching. Blood tests can be done in pregnant women to check for previous immunity (antibodies).

When can my child return to school?

Once the rash occurs, children are no longer contagious and do not need to be excluded from school unless their temperature is over 100.