



Fifth Disease

(parvovirus B19)

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What is it?

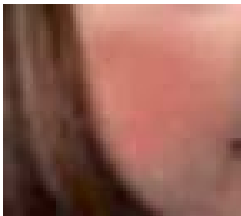
Fifth disease is a mild infection that is found worldwide. It occurs most often in children. Most cases occur in the winter and spring seasons.

What causes it?

Fifth disease is caused by an infection with human parvovirus B19. Dogs and cats can be immunized for parvoviruses but these viruses do not infect humans. A human cannot get parvovirus from an animal and an animal cannot get the virus from a human.

What are the symptoms?

Some people will have no symptoms. A small number of people (15% to 30%) will have a fever. The majority of people will feel symptoms of malaise (feeling unwell), headache, muscle ache and a rash. The facial rash has a red, “slapped cheek” appearance, with a white area around the mouth. A “lace-like” rash that usually starts on the body and extends to the arms, buttocks and thighs follows the “slapped cheek” rash one to four days later. Some children complain of itchiness. The rash usually lasts about a week. It may become more intense or reoccur after a warm bath, exercise, or exposure to the sun, for up to three weeks. It is rare for adults to develop a rash; however joint pain and/or swelling lasting days to months are more common.



Slapped
cheek
rash of
the face.



Lace-like
rash of the
leg.

What is the incubation period?

The time between coming in contact with the virus and the symptoms beginning can range from 4 to 20 days.

What treatment is available?

Treating symptoms of fever, pain and itching is usually all that is needed. People with immune problems may need special medications to help fight the illness.

When is it contagious?

This disease is most contagious before the development of the rash.

How is it spread?

Fifth disease can spread before the rash appears through direct contact with respiratory secretions or droplets. Direct contact includes, coughing, sneezing or sharing drinking cups and utensils. An infected pregnant woman could pass it on to her baby. During a school outbreak 10% to 60% of the students may develop fifth disease.

OVER ►

Windsor Office:
1005 Ouellette Avenue
Windsor, Ontario
(519) 258-2146
Fax: 258-6003

Leamington Office:
215 Talbot Street East
Leamington, Ontario
(519) 326-5716
Fax: 326-4642

Essex Office:
360 Fairview Avenue West
Suite 215, Essex, Ontario
(519) 776-5933
Fax: 776-6102

Website:
www.wechealthunit.org



Are there any possible complications?

Severe complications are unusual in healthy children and adults. Some adults may develop arthritis (joint pain) that may last for several months. People with sickle cell anemia may develop TAC (transient aplastic crisis - low blood count). There is also concern for the unborn baby if the mother is infected early in the pregnancy.

Other:

Fifth disease may look like other diseases that have a red rash, such as rubella, scarlet fever and erythema multiforme (inflammatory skin eruption). Because they are infectious before the rash appears, a child with fifth disease may attend school if they feel well enough to participate in all activities. “Although children with B19 infection are most infectious before the onset of illness, it may be prudent to exclude them from school or day care attendance while fever is present.” - *Control of Communicable Disease Manual, 18th Edition*

A pregnant woman should contact her doctor if she has been in contact with a child with fifth disease.

Not everyone exposed to fifth disease will get the disease. Fifty percent of household contacts of a child with the illness will not become ill.

Can it be prevented?

Frequent hand washing with soap and warm water and throwing away used facial tissues are very important ways to prevent the spread of fifth disease.

Sources:

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Windsor, Ontario
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