



FACT SHEET: FIFTH DISEASE

Fifth disease is a mild rash illness caused by a virus called human parvovirus B19. It is more common in children but can infect adults as well. The infection does not cause serious illness in most people and the rash resolves in 7 to 10 days.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Symptoms generally appear between 4 and 14 days after coming into contact with the virus.

Some people who are infected with fifth disease may not show any symptoms. The first symptoms of fifth disease are usually mild and may include:

- Fever
- Runny nose
- Headache
- May also be stomach upset (nausea and diarrhea)

After several days, a red rash may appear on the cheeks (slapped cheek appearance).

A red, lace-like rash may appear on the body, arms and legs 1-4 days later. The rash may be itchy. The rash may last from 1-3 weeks. During that time, the rash may come and go. It can be worse with changes in temperature, exposure to sunlight, and exercise.

In adults, a rash is not usually seen. Adults may develop joint pain. The joint pain usually lasts 1 to 3 weeks, but it can last for months or longer. It usually goes away without any long-term problems.

HOW IS IT SPREAD?

Fifth disease spreads through respiratory secretions (such as saliva or nasal mucus). It is spread person to person by direct contact with these fluids; for example when sneezing and coughing or by touching a used facial tissue or sharing cups and utensils.

Fifth disease is most contagious before the rash appears. Once the rash appears, a child is not likely to spread the infection. As a result, children diagnosed with fifth disease do not need to be excluded from school or child care if they are feeling well enough to participate in normal activities.

Transmission during pregnancy from mother to fetus is possible, but does not always occur.

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CAN FIFTH DISEASE BE DANGEROUS?

Fifth disease is usually very mild. Some children may not even feel sick. It's usually more severe in adults. However, some people are at risk of serious complications if they become infected, including:

- Those with certain forms of chronic anemia (such as sickle cell).
- Those with weakened immune systems due to disease or medical treatment.
- Pregnant women.

If you are at risk of serious complications from fifth disease there is a blood test that can determine if you have recently been infected with parvovirus B19 or if you are immune due to previous infection.

HOW IT CAN BE PREVENTED

There is no vaccine or medication that prevents infection with parvovirus B19.

You can lower the chance of getting sick with fifth disease by doing the following:

- Frequent hand washing to decrease the chance of becoming infected.
- Cover your cough. Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick.

- Do not share eating utensils or cups with others.

Most people who had fifth disease as a child will not get it again.

HOW IS IT TREATED

There is no treatment for fifth disease.

Treatment of symptoms such as fever, pain, or itching is usually all that is needed for fifth disease.

Children may continue with usual activities provided they feel well.

If you are pregnant or have a weak immune system or certain blood disorders, see your doctor. You may need extra checkups, tests, or treatment.

REFERENCES

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