

## **FIFTH DISEASE**

### **Information for School-Aged Children**

Fifth disease (also called parvovirus B19 infection) is a mild, common illness caused by a virus. Rash is the most common symptom. Fifty to 80% of adults have had fifth disease and will not get it again (are immune). Outbreaks of fifth disease frequently occur in schools.

**CAUSE:** Human parvovirus B19.

**SYMPTOMS:** Rash; possibly a low-grade fever or sore throat. The characteristic rash causes an intense redness of the cheeks ("slapped cheek" appearance) in children. The rash often begins on the cheeks and is later found on the arms, upper body, buttocks, and legs; it has a very fine, lacy, pink appearance. In general, the rash on the face will fade within 4 days. The rash on the rest of the body usually fades within 3-7 days. However, the rash tends to come and go for days or even weeks, when the person is exposed to sunlight or heat. Adults, especially women, may have pain, redness, and swelling of the joints. Joint pain and swelling may last 1-3 months.

Most people who get fifth disease do not become very ill. However, children with sickle cell anemia, chronic anemia, or a weakened immune system may become seriously ill and require medical care when infected with parvovirus B19.

**SPREAD:** When a person with fifth disease coughs or sneezes tiny droplets with parvovirus B19 into the air and another person breathes them in. People can also get infected from touching these secretions and then touching their mouth, eyes, or nose.

**INCUBATION:** It takes from 4 to 21 days, usually 4 to 14 days, from the time of infection until symptoms begin.

**CONTAGIOUS PERIOD:** Most contagious before the beginning of rash and unlikely to be contagious after the rash begins.

**EXCLUSION:** None, if other rash-causing illnesses are ruled out by a healthcare provider, since persons with fifth disease are no longer infectious once the rash begins.

**DIAGNOSIS:** Blood tests are available to determine whether you are immune (have had fifth disease in the past and cannot get it again) or are currently infected with parvovirus B19.

**TREATMENT:** None.

**PREVENTION/CONTROL:**

1. Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm running water after touching secretions from the nose or mouth. **Thorough handwashing is the best way to prevent the spread of infectious diseases.**
2. Dispose of used tissues.
3. Pregnant women or children who have weakened immune systems, sickle cell anemia, or other blood disorders should call their healthcare provider if they have been exposed to someone with fifth disease. If you do not know whether you are immune, call your healthcare provider for advice and whether a blood test is needed.

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### **INFORMATION FOR PREGNANT WOMEN:**

Usually there are no serious problems for a pregnant woman or her baby because of an exposure to fifth disease. About 50% of women have already had fifth disease (are immune), so they and their babies are not at risk. Even if a woman is susceptible and gets infected with parvovirus B19, she usually experiences only mild illness. Likewise, her unborn baby usually does not have any problems caused by parvovirus B19 infection.

Sometimes, parvovirus B19 infection will cause the unborn baby to have severe anemia and the woman may have a miscarriage. This occurs in less than 5% of all pregnant women who are infected with parvovirus B19 and happens more commonly during the first half of pregnancy. There is no evidence that parvovirus B19 infection causes birth defects or mental retardation. (For additional information on parvovirus B19 virus and pregnancy see pages 17-18.)

For more information, you or your healthcare provider may call Hennepin County Community Health Department at (952) 351-5230, or call your local health department.