

Fifth Disease- Factsheet

What is Fifth disease?

Fifth disease is a mild rash illness caused by a human parvovirus called B19.

What are the symptoms of Fifth disease?

Symptoms usually begin 4 to 14 days after exposure to the virus, but they can take up to 21 days to appear. Symptoms may include a mild fever, runny nose, tiredness, and headache. The most common symptom is a rash, which can look like slapped cheeks. The rash can also develop on the trunk, arms, and legs. After a few days, the rash starts to look “lacy” and may be itchy. The rash usually goes away in seven to ten days but can come and go for several weeks. Some people, especially adult women, have joint pain and swelling. This usually lasts one to three weeks, but can sometimes last for months or longer.

How is Fifth disease spread?

It is spread from person to person by direct contact with the nose or throat secretions of an infected person, like their saliva (drool), sputum, or nasal mucus, or by touching objects freshly soiled with those fluids (such as toys or eating utensils). Less often, it can be spread through blood transfusions, direct contact with contaminated blood, or in utero transmission from mother to fetus.

How long are people contagious?

People are usually the most contagious before the rash develops, when their symptoms may just be a fever or a “cold.” After the rash appears, a person is usually no longer contagious. If a person develops aplastic crisis, which is a more severe effect of Fifth disease, or if the person has a weakened immune system, s/he may continue to be contagious for a longer period of time.

Who gets Fifth disease?

Although more common in children, people of any age can get Fifth disease. Not everyone who is infected becomes ill. Once a person has had Fifth disease, they generally will not get it again. Outbreaks may occur in schools and childcare centers.

What treatment is available for people with Fifth disease?

No specific treatment is available for Fifth disease. Fifth disease is usually mild and will go away on its own. If a pregnant woman is exposed to someone with Fifth disease or gets the illness, she should contact her doctor right away.

Do infected people need to be kept home from school, work, or daycare?

Generally, people with Fifth disease do not need to be kept home. This is because once a person is known to have Fifth disease (as identified by the type of rash), s/he is no longer contagious.

How can I protect myself and my family from getting Fifth disease?

- Wash hands often, for at least 20 seconds, with water and soap. (Sanitizing gel may be substituted when hands are not visibly soiled.)
- Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth without washing your hands first.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick and stay home when you are sick.
- Clean “dirty” or contaminated surfaces and soiled items first with soap and water, and then disinfect them with a dilute solution of chlorine-containing bleach (made by mixing approximately ¼ cup of bleach with one gallon of water).