



Durham Region Health Department **Facts about...**



Fifth Disease (Erythema Infectiosum)

What is it?

Fifth disease (Erythema Infectiosum) is a common virus illness caused by human parvovirus B19. It is also called “slapped cheek” disease because the virus causes a red rash on the cheeks. Fifth disease is most common in the late winter and early spring.

How is it spread?

Fifth disease is spread by coming in contact with the saliva, nasal and throat secretions of an infected person. Coughing, sneezing, and sharing drinking cups or utensils are common methods of spread. It is contagious starting a few days before the rash appears. Once the rash appears, Fifth Disease is no longer contagious.

What do I look for?

Fifth disease often begins with mild fever, runny nose, headache, and feeling unwell. Usually, a rash on the face appears that is very red with a “slapped cheek” appearance. A few days later a red, lace-like rash develops on the trunk, arms, and legs. The rash may be itchy. It can fade but may come and go over the next 1-3 weeks. The rash may be less obvious on brown and black skin.

Parvovirus B19 can also infect adults. Adults may experience fever and joint pain. It can also cause anemia and other complications.

How is it treated?

Fifth disease is caused by a virus. There is no treatment. There is no need to stay out of school or work.

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How can I protect myself?

- Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly with soap and water or use hand sanitizers when hands are not visibly dirty.
- Cough or sneeze into your elbow and encourage others to do the same.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Do not share water bottles, straws, eating utensils, cigarettes, toothbrushes, toys or anything else that has been in contact with saliva, nose or throat secretions.
- If you are ill, stay at home and isolate yourself from others. About half of women of childbearing age have had parvovirus B19 in early life and have developed immunity to this virus. However, if a woman is infected with the virus for the first time during pregnancy, there is a very small risk that their infant may be affected. If you are pregnant and are concerned about Fifth disease, follow up with your doctor/health care provider.
- Individuals who are immunocompromised, or who have anemia should also see their doctor if exposed to Fifth disease.

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905-668-2020 or 1-800-841-2729 | durham.ca/health

If you require this information in an accessible format, contact 1-800-841-2729.

