

You are being provided with this fact sheet:

- because you or your child may have been exposed to fifth disease.** If you believe your child has developed fifth disease, contact your health care provider. Notify your child care provider or preschool if a diagnosis of fifth disease is made.

- for informational purposes only.**

What is fifth disease?

Fifth disease is a mild illness caused by a virus. It is also known as “slapped cheek disease” or erythema infectiosum. It is called fifth disease because common rash diseases in children were originally organized by number. It occurs most commonly in children. The virus that causes the disease is called parvovirus B19. Parvoviruses in animals are different than those in humans. Cats and dogs cannot spread fifth disease.

What are the symptoms of fifth disease?

The classic symptoms of fifth disease is a bright red rash on the cheeks that makes them appear to be “slapped.” A couple days later, the rash typically spreads and red blotches (usually lighter in color) extend down to the arms, buttocks and legs. As the centers of the blotches begin to clear, the rash takes on a lacy net-like appearance. The rash may be accompanied by itching. The rash usually resolves in 7 to 10 days, but may recur for 1 to 3 weeks upon exposure to heat or sunlight. Adults who get fifth disease may develop the typical rash seen in children as well as joint pain and swelling. Other mild symptoms include fever*, headache, and runny nose. Symptoms usually appear 4 to 14 days (sometimes up to 21 days) after exposure. Some individuals may have the disease and be contagious, but never show symptoms.

How is fifth disease spread?

Fifth disease most easily spreads from person-to-person during the early part of the illness when the illness appears to be ‘just a cold.’ Infection may develop after exposure to respiratory secretions such as saliva or mucus from an infected person when they cough or sneeze. Objects such as used tissues, mouthed toys, drinking cups, and utensils can spread the virus. Once the characteristic “slapped cheek” rash appears, a person is no longer considered contagious.

Who is at risk for fifth disease?

Although anyone who has not had fifth disease can become ill, the disease is most common in children. Most people who get fifth disease are not very ill and recover fully. Some individuals with sickle-cell disease, chronic anemia, or immune system deficiencies may become seriously ill and require medical attention.

Pregnant women should consult their health care provider because exposure to parvovirus B19 can, on rare occasions, result in severe anemia to the unborn baby and possibly result in miscarriage. Most pregnant women who do become ill with fifth disease have only a mild illness and there are no adverse effects on the fetus. Miscarriage occurs in less than 5% of all pregnant women infected with fifth disease and is most common during the first half of pregnancy. Approximately half of all pregnant women have already been exposed to parvovirus B19 and are immune. Lab testing can determine if a person has previously been exposed.

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Child Care Health Outreach Program

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How is fifth disease diagnosed?

A health care provider usually makes a diagnosis of fifth disease based on the symptoms. A blood test is not commonly done, but can be used to see if someone has previously been exposed to the disease or has recently been infected.

How is fifth disease treated?

Fifth disease is usually a mild illness that resolves on its own among children and adults who are otherwise healthy. Most people with fifth disease require only general comfort measures to help ease the symptoms. Pregnant women or patients with anemia or immune deficiencies may require specialized treatment, but this is mostly to manage symptoms. There is no vaccine to prevent fifth disease.

How can the spread of fifth disease be reduced?

- Use good handwashing techniques often.
- Avoid sharing personal articles that may be contaminated with saliva, such as drinking cups, eating utensils, and mouthed toys.
- Use a sanitizing solution on toys and surfaces.
- Dispose of facial tissues properly. Teach children to cover their mouth and nose with a tissue or their upper sleeve when they cough or sneeze.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Avoid close contact with people who are ill.

Exclude from group setting?

Excluding a child diagnosed with fifth disease from school or child care is not necessary because the child is no longer contagious once the rash appears. Ensure that pregnant woman who may have been exposed are aware of the potential risk.

* Fever is defined as a temperature above 101°F (38.3°C) by any method or above 100.4°F (38.0°C) for infants younger than 2 months old.

References:

American Academy of Pediatrics

- Managing Infectious Diseases in Child Care and Schools, 4th ed.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Website)

- Parvovirus B19 and Fifth Disease. Accessed December 2020

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Website)

- Pregnancy and Fifth Disease. Accessed December 2020.

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