

# FIFTH DISEASE

Fifth Disease is generally a mild, viral illness that occurs mostly in young children between the ages of 5 and 15. Fifth disease typically produces a distinctive red rash on the face that makes the child appear to have a slapped cheek. The rash then spreads to the trunk, arms, and legs. Fifth disease is actually a viral illness that the majority of children will recover from-with no complications-in a short period of time. Fifth disease (also called erythema infectiosum) is caused by parvovirus B19. Outbreaks of fifth disease tend to happen in the late winter and early spring, but can occur any time throughout the year.

## **Signs and Symptoms:**

Fifth disease begins with a low-grade fever, headache, and mild cold-like symptoms (a stuffy or runny nose). These symptoms pass, and the illness seems to be gone until a rash appears a few days later. The bright red rash typically begins on the face. Several days later, the rash spreads and red blotches extend down to the trunk, arms, and legs. As the centers of the blotches begin to clear, the rash takes on a lacy net-like appearance.

Some children will complain the rash itches. It may take 1 to 3 weeks for the rash to completely clear, and during this time it may seem to worsen until it finally fades away entirely. Certain stimuli (including sunlight, heat, exercise, and stress) may reactivate the rash until it completely fades.

## **Contagiousness:**

The most contagious period is just before onset of fever, gradually declining during the following week and low to absent by the time the rash appears.

Parvovirus spreads easily from person to person in fluids from the nose, mouth, and throat of someone with the infection, especially from coughs and sneezes. It can also be spread through shared drinking glasses and utensils. Hand washing and proper tissue disposal should be practiced.

## **Treatment:**

There is no specific treatment for fifth disease. Ask your child's health care provider for advice on treating the discomfort of the rash.

## **School Exclusion Guidelines:**

This illness is most transmissible **before the onset of symptoms**. After the rash appears the child is no longer contagious and does not need to be excluded from school.

## **Complications:**

Some children with weakened immune systems (cancer, AIDS) or those with certain blood disorders (like sickle cell anemia or hemolytic anemia) may become significantly ill when they have an infection with parvovirus B19 and need to seek medical advice.

If you are pregnant and are exposed to fifth disease, seek medical advice from your health care provider. Women who develop fifth disease during pregnancy may pass the infection to their unborn fetus.