

Fifth Disease

Fifth disease is an infection caused by a virus called parvovirus B19. It is also referred to as “slapped cheek” syndrome because it appears as a very red rash on the cheeks.

What are the symptoms of fifth disease?

A rash begins on the cheek then after 1 to 4 days; a red, lace-like rash develops first on the torso and arms, then over the rest of the body. The lace-like rash fades, but may reoccur for 1-3 weeks on exposure to sunlight or heat. Occasionally the rash may itch. A child is usually not very ill, but may have a low-grade fever, tiredness, or a mild cold. Adults may experience fever and joint pain.

How is a fifth disease spread?

It is found in respiratory secretions of an infected person. The virus is spread from person to person through direct contact with those secretions, such as sharing drinking cups or utensils. It can also be transmitted from mother to fetus.

How long is fifth disease contagious?

A person is most infectious for several days before the rash starts, when they appear to have a mild cold. Once the rash appears, a person is no longer contagious.

How is a respiratory infection treated?

There is no treatment for fifth disease, and no vaccine is yet available.

More to know

- People with underlying anemia & immune-deficiencies may choose to avoid exposure to potentially infectious people.
- Pregnant women who have had the virus in childhood, and who have confirmed that they have the protective antibodies, are not at risk. However, pregnant women who have never had the virus and do not have protective antibodies should contact their physician. The virus will not damage the unborn baby, there is a slight risk that the fetus will develop anemia before birth.
- Adults usually get a more severe case, with fever and painful joints.
- At least 50% of adults have had fifth disease in childhood and will not get it again if exposed to it.
- Proper hand hygiene is very important to prevent the spread of the virus.
- Remind children not to share cups and utensils.



**Northwestern
Health Unit**

www.nwhu.on.ca