



Fifth Disease

Fifth disease is a mild rash illness caused by parvovirus B19. It is more common in children than adults. A person usually gets sick with fifth disease within 14 days after getting infected with parvovirus B19. This disease, also called erythema infectiosum, got its name because it was fifth in a list of historical classifications of common skin rash illnesses in children.

Signs & Symptoms

The symptoms of fifth disease are usually mild and may include

- fever
- runny nose
- headache
- rash

You can get a rash on your face and body

You may get a red rash on your face called “[slapped cheek](#)” rash. This rash is the most recognized feature of fifth disease. It is more common in children than adults.

Some people may get a second rash a few days later on their chest, back, buttocks, or arms and legs. The rash may be itchy, especially on the soles of the feet. It can vary in intensity and usually goes away in seven to 10 days, but it can come and go for several weeks. As it starts to go away, it may look lacy.

You may also have painful or swollen joints

People with fifth disease can also develop pain and swelling in their joints. This is called polyarthropathy syndrome. It is more common in adults, especially women. Some adults with fifth disease may only have painful joints, usually in the hands, feet, or knees, and no other symptoms. The joint pain usually lasts 1 to 3 weeks, but it can last for months or longer. It usually goes away without any long-term problems.

Complications

Fifth disease is usually mild for children and adults who are otherwise healthy. But for some people, parvovirus B19 infection can cause serious health complications, such as chronic anemia that requires medical treatment.

You may be at risk for serious complications from fifth disease if you have a weakened immune system caused by leukemia, cancer, organ transplants, or HIV infection.

Transmission

Parvovirus B19—which causes fifth disease—spreads through respiratory secretions, such as saliva, sputum, or nasal mucus, when an infected person coughs or sneezes. You are most contagious when it seems like you have “just a fever and/or cold” and before you get the rash or joint pain and swelling. After you get the rash you are not likely to be contagious, so it is usually safe for you or your child to go back to work or school.

People with fifth disease who have weakened immune systems may be contagious for a longer amount of time.

Parvovirus B19 can also spread through blood or blood products. A pregnant woman who is infected with parvovirus B19 can pass the virus to her baby.

Once you recover from fifth disease, you develop immunity that generally protects you from parvovirus B19 infection in the future.

Diagnosis

Healthcare providers can often diagnose fifth disease just by seeing “slapped cheek” rash on a patient’s face. They can also do a blood test to determine if you are susceptible or possibly immune to parvovirus B19 infection or if you were recently infected. This is not a routine test but can be performed in special circumstances. The blood test may be particularly helpful for pregnant women who may have been exposed to parvovirus B19 and are suspected to have fifth disease. Any pregnant woman who may have been exposed to parvovirus B19 should contact their obstetrician or healthcare provider as soon as possible.

Prevention & Treatment

Prevention

There is no vaccine or medicine that can prevent parvovirus B19 infection. You can reduce your chance of being infected or infecting others by

- washing your hands often, for at least 20 seconds, with soap and water
- covering your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze
- not touching your eyes, nose, or mouth
- avoiding close contact with people who are sick
- staying home when you are sick

Once you get the rash, you are probably not contagious. So, it is usually safe for you to go back to work or for your child to return to school or a child care center.

Healthcare providers who are pregnant should know about potential risks to their baby and discuss this with their doctor.

All healthcare providers and patients should follow strict infection control practices to prevent parvovirus B19 from spreading. For information about handwashing, see [CDC’s Clean Hands Save Lives!](#)

Treatment

Fifth disease is usually mild and will go away on its own. Children and adults who are otherwise healthy usually recover completely. Treatment usually involves relieving symptoms, such as fever, itching, and joint pain and swelling.

People who have complications from fifth disease should see their healthcare provider for medical treatment.

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