

FIFTH DISEASE FACT SHEET

What is fifth disease?

Fifth disease is a mild rash infection caused by parvovirus B19.

Who can get fifth disease?

Anyone. However, it is more common in children than adults.

What are the symptoms of fifth disease?

The first symptoms which are usually mild may include the following:

- Fever
- Runny nose
- Headache

After several days, you may develop a red rash on the face called “slapped-cheek.” The rash is the most recognizable feature of the disease. 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 and usually goes away in 7–10 days but can come and go for several weeks. People may also develop pain and swelling in their joints. People who have a weakened immune systems are at risk for serious complications from fifth disease.

How soon do symptoms of fifth disease appear?

Symptoms usually begin 4–14 days after becoming infected with the virus.

How is fifth disease spread?

Fifth disease spreads through respiratory secretions (such as saliva, sputum, or nasal mucus) when the infected person sneezes or coughs. Infected people are most contagious when they feel like it is “just a cold” and before they develop a rash or joint pain and swelling. People who have a weakened immune system may be contagious for a longer period of time. The virus that causes the disease can also spread through blood or blood products. An infected pregnant woman can pass the virus to her baby.

How is fifth disease diagnosed?

A physician can often diagnose fifth disease by seeing the typical rash during a physical examination. A blood test can also be done to determine if you are immune to or were recently infected with parvovirus B19.

How is fifth disease treated?

Fifth disease is often mild and tends to go away on its own. Treatment of fifth disease usually involves relieving symptoms such as fever, itching, joint pain and swelling. People with complications are encouraged to see their healthcare provider for treatment.

How can people protect themselves against fifth disease?

There is no vaccine or medicine that prevents fifth disease. However, people can limit the spread of infection by doing the following:

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water, scrubbing your hands for at least 20 seconds
- When you cough or sneeze, cover your mouth and nose with a tissue, or your upper sleeve or elbow (not your hands) if you don't have a tissue
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth
- Avoid close contact with infected people – infection can affect pregnancy
- Stay at home when sick

Should a person with fifth disease be excused from school/daycare?

A child should stay at home when they have cold-like symptoms and before the rash develops. Once the rash has developed they can return to school/daycare.

Where can I get more information?

Information about fifth disease and other related health topics can be found at www.cdc.gov. The DC Department of Health promotes the health and safety of the District residents. For additional information, please visit www.doh.dc.gov or call (202) 442-9371.