



# FIFTH DISEASE

## WHAT IS FIFTH DISEASE?

Fifth disease (or *Erythema Infectiosum*) is a viral illness caused by Human Parvovirus B19. It is also known as "**slapped cheek disease**" because it starts out as a bright red rash on the cheeks, appearing as if one had just been slapped on the cheeks, and pale white about the lips. While it can occur anytime, there can be school outbreaks in late winter and early spring.

## WHO CAN GET FIFTH DISEASE?

It is most common in young school-age children. Children often get it at school or other places where children gather. Adults can get fifth disease too if they missed getting it as a child, but most infections are in children.

## WHAT ARE SYMPTOMS OF FIFTH DISEASE?

Symptoms usually show up 4 to 14 days after a child is exposed to the disease. About 4 in 5 infected children have very mild symptoms for about a week before getting the rash. About 1 in 5 will have no symptoms at all before the rash appears. Children are most contagious before the rash is noted (before they know they have the disease) and are not considered contagious after the rash appears.

Early symptoms are usually very mild. These may include:

- Low fever (15-30%)
- Headache
- Runny nose
- Sore throat
- Itching
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea

The rash is usually the main symptom of fifth disease. It:

- Starts on the cheeks and is bright red.
- Spreads to the trunk, arms, and legs, and lasts 2 to 4 days. It often has a "lacey" appearance that can come and go.
- May come back when the child is exposed to sunlight, heat or cold, or injury to the skin. This may continue for several days.

The symptoms of fifth disease can be like other health conditions. Make sure your child sees his or her health care provider for a diagnosis.

## HOW IS FIFTH DISEASE SPREAD?

Fifth disease is spread from one child to another through direct contact with fluid from the nose and throat. It can also be spread through contact with infected blood. It is somewhat contagious.

## HOW IS FIFTH DISEASE DIAGNOSED?

The health care provider will ask about your child's symptoms and health history. He or she will give your child a physical exam. The physical exam will include inspecting the rash. The rash is unique to fifth disease and may be enough to diagnose your child. In some cases, your child may also have blood tests.

## HOW IS FIFTH DISEASE TREATED?

Treatment will depend on your child's symptoms, age, and general health. It will also depend on how severe the condition is. Because it is caused by a virus, antibiotics will not help your child. Once having had the disease, one is thought to develop life-long immunity.

The goal of treatment is to help ease symptoms. Treatment may include:

- Making sure your child drinks plenty of fluids
- Giving acetaminophen or ibuprofen for fever and discomfort
- Giving an antihistamine medicine for itching

Talk with your child's health care providers about the risks, benefits, and possible side effects of all medicines. Don't give ibuprofen to a child younger than 6 months old, unless your health care provider tells you to. Don't give aspirin to children under age 12. Aspirin can cause a serious health condition called Reye syndrome.

## HOW CAN I HELP PREVENT FIFTH DISEASE?

The best ways to keep fifth disease from spreading include:

- Washing hands well with soap and warm water
- Covering the mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing



## DOES MY CHILD NEED TO STAY HOME FROM CHILDCARE/SCHOOL?

### YOUR CHILD SHOULD NOT ATTEND CHILDCARE/SCHOOL IF ONE OF THE FOLLOWING APPLIES:

- They have a fever (100.4F or higher), they are unable to cover their cough, diarrhea, nausea, vomiting.
- They do not feel well enough to participate in classroom activities (for example, unusually tired, cranky or fussy, or crying more than normal.)