

What is fifth disease?

Fifth disease is a mild rash illness caused by parvovirus B19. It is more common in children than adults. This disease got its name because it was fifth in a list of common skin rash illnesses in children.

How is fifth disease spread?

It spreads from person to person, just like a cold, often through breathing, coughing and saliva, so it can spread through close contact between people and hand-to-hand contact.

Since parvovirus B19 only infects humans, a person cannot get the virus from a dog or cat. Also, dogs and cats cannot get parvovirus B19 from an infected person.

Pet dogs and cats can get infected with other parvoviruses that do not infect humans. Pets can be vaccinated to protect them from parvovirus infection.

Parvovirus infection can also spread through blood. An infected pregnant woman can pass the virus to her baby.

What are the signs and symptoms of fifth disease?

It's sometimes called slapped-cheek disease because of the face rash that develops. The symptoms of fifth disease are usually mild and may include fever, runny nose, headache, and rash. Eventually, the rash may spread to the arms, trunk, thighs and buttocks, where the rash has a pink, lacy, and slightly raised

appearance. The rash may be itchy, especially on the soles of the feet.

Generally, the rash occurs near the end of the illness. It's possible to mistake the rash for other viral rashes or a medicine-related rash. The rash may come and go for up to three weeks.

Adults don't usually develop the slapped-cheek rash. Instead, the most noticeable symptom of parvovirus infection in adults is joint soreness, lasting days to weeks. Joints most commonly affected are the hands, wrists, knees and ankles.

How long after infection do symptoms appear?

A person usually gets sick with fifth disease within 14 days after getting infected with parvovirus B19.

Who is most at risk?

Fifth disease is usually mild for children and adults who are otherwise healthy. 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.

What type of health problems are caused by fifth disease?

For some people, parvovirus B19 infection can cause serious health complications, such as chronic anemia that requires medical treatment.

How is fifth disease diagnosed?

Healthcare providers can often diagnose fifth disease just by seeing “slapped cheek” rash on a child’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.

How is fifth disease treated?

Fifth disease is usually mild and will go away on its own. Children and adults who are otherwise healthy usually recover completely. People with severe anemia may need to stay in the hospital and receive blood transfusions. Those with weakened immune systems may receive antibodies to treat the infection. Treatment usually involves relieving symptoms, such as fever, itching, and joint pain and swelling.

How can fifth disease be prevented?

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, and
- 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 childcare center.

Where can I get more information?

- Your personal healthcare provider
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [Kid’s Health](#)
- [Mayo Clinic](#)

08/2021

