

Fifth Disease

(Erythema Infectiosum, Parvovirus B19 Infections)

What is Fifth Disease?

Fifth Disease is a common viral infection in children. It is also known as slapped cheek disease. This is due to the bright red facial rash that is one of the signs of the infection. Fifth disease is most common in 5 to 8 year olds.

What causes Fifth Disease?

Fifth disease is caused by a virus called parvovirus B19. The virus is spread by droplets in the air when someone who is infected sneezes or coughs. The virus can spread easily from person to person in its early stages, before the rash appears.

How is it diagnosed?

Fifth disease is easily diagnosed by the appearance of the distinctive rash. There are no tests for Fifth disease. Fifth disease has three stages:

1. Your child may have a low fever, headache or chills. It may seem like they have a mild cold.
2. Your child will get a rash on their face. The rash looks bright rosy red on the cheeks. Your child may also look pale around the mouth because the cheeks are so red. This first rash fades in a few days.
3. A rash may appear on your child's body, arms and legs. This second rash is flat, purple-red color and "lacy" in appearance. It may itch. This second rash may take 1 to 3 weeks to go away. The rash will come and go with changes in the time of day and amount of fever. Being out in the sun may also cause the rash to come back.

How is it treated?

Fifth disease needs no treatment. It will go away on its own. To help your child feel better:

- Ask your child's doctor or nurse if your child should have medicine for fever.
- An anti-itch medicine called an antihistamine may be recommended if the rash is itchy.

Special information

- The virus that causes fifth disease may harm an unborn child. Your child should not be around any woman who is pregnant. Pregnant women should consult their health care provider before having contact with a child with fifth disease.
- Once the fever goes away, your child can no longer spread the virus and may return to school or daycare, even if your child still has the rash.
- Once your child has had Fifth Disease, your child will not get it again.

ALERT: Call your child's doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have any questions or concerns or if your child has special health care needs that were not covered by this information.

This teaching sheet is meant to help you care for your child. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up.

