



Fifth Disease



What is Fifth Disease?

Fifth disease, also known as Erythema Infectiosum, is a viral infection caused by the human parvovirus, B19. Most cases appear in winter and spring, and clusters or outbreaks are not unusual in elementary and middle schools. It is common in children, but adults can become infected also and can cause complications for women early in pregnancy.

How is Fifth Disease spread?

- Most likely spread from person to person through respiratory secretions.
- The interval from exposure to development of the rash is usually 4-20 days.
- Can be transmitted from infected mother to a fetus.
- 50% of adults have serological evidence of past infection and are probably not susceptible to re-infection.

How is Fifth Disease treated?

There is no treatment specifically for Fifth Disease, treatment of symptoms such as fever, pain or itching may be needed. Adults with joint pain and swelling may need to restrict their activity. Acetaminophen may be recommended to control fever and joint pain.

How can Fifth Disease be prevented?


- Strict hand washing is recommended after contact with an infected person or respiratory secretions.
- Exposed pregnant women should consult their physician regarding antibody testing to determine susceptibility and assist with counseling regarding risk to their fetuses.
- Pregnant women with infected children at home are advised to wash their hands frequently and avoid sharing eating utensils.

Symptoms of Fifth Disease:

- A bright red rash begins on the face, producing a slapped cheek appearance.
- After 1-4 days, a lace-like rash appears on the arms, trunk, buttocks, and thighs.
- Rash usually resolves in 7 - 10 days.
- The rash recurs and fluctuates in intensity with environmental changes such as temperature and sunlight.
- Other possible symptoms are fever, headache, fatigue, joint pain, and swelling.
- Can also have mild respiratory or gastrointestinal illness without the rash.
- Persons are most infectious before the onset of rash and are unlikely to be infectious after onset of the rash or other symptoms.

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