

STAFF RESOURCES

Fifth Disease: What You Should Know

Fifth disease (also called erythema infectiosum) is caused by parvovirus B19. A human virus, parvovirus B19 is not the same parvovirus that veterinarians might be concerned about in pets (especially dogs) and it cannot be passed from humans to animals or vice versa.

Anyone may be infected by this disease, but it seems to occur more often in elementary school-age children. Therefore, people who spend a lot of time with children are more likely to be exposed to the virus.

The virus is spread by exposure to airborne droplets from the nose and throat of infected people.

Outbreaks of Fifth disease could happen any time of the year, but most occur during the winter and spring. Symptoms generally appear four to 14 days after exposure to the virus.

Signs and symptoms

Fifth disease in children generally follows a certain pattern. Some kids develop mild, cold-like symptoms early in the illness. These include:

- sore throat
- slight fever
- upset stomach
- headache
- fatigue
- itching.

Several days later, a distinctive red facial rash usually appears on both

cheeks. Eventually, the rash may extend to the arms, trunk, thighs and buttocks. The rash may have a pink, lacy, slightly raised appearance; it usually lasts one to three weeks.

In adults, the most prominent symptom is soreness of the joints that lasts days or weeks. Joints most commonly affected are the hands, wrists, knees and ankles. Fifth disease can also occur without any signs or symptoms in both children and adults.

Diagnosis and effects

Because the illness is considered mild, many adults might not be aware that they have had it, especially since many people do not have symptoms. About 50 percent of adults have had the infection, have developed antibodies to prevent future infection and are immune.

People with Fifth disease are most infectious before the onset of symptoms and are no longer contagious after development of the rash. Diagnosis is made on the basis of a medical history and physical examination. When an exact diagnosis is important, the health care provider can order an antibody titer blood test.

Fifth disease usually resolves on its own among children and adults who are otherwise healthy. Children usually feel well and are back to normal activities by the time the rash appears.

Complications

Some people are at a higher risk of complications or serious illness if they get Fifth disease, including:

- unborn fetuses of pregnant women who develop Fifth disease.
- children and adults with immunodeficiency or a chronic blood disorder.

Consult your health care provider if you are exposed to Fifth disease and are at a higher risk of complications.

When an outbreak occurs

If an outbreak of Fifth disease occurs at school, notify:

- all parents/guardians of students.
- staff who are pregnant.
- staff with impaired immune systems or blood disorders.

Be sure to provide additional instructions to staff on how to decrease the spread of the virus.

- Practice good hand-washing techniques and instruct staff to make certain that students frequently wash their hands.
- Remind employees to cover their faces when coughing and sneezing, and have students do the same.
- Appropriately disinfect the building.

Excluding individuals with Fifth disease from work, child care or school is not likely to prevent the spread of the virus since people are contagious before they develop the rash.



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