

FIFTH DISEASE

What is fifth disease?

Fifth disease is caused by a human parvovirus called B19.

What are the symptoms of fifth disease?

Symptoms usually begin 4 to 14 days after exposure to the virus, but they can take as long as 21 days to appear. Symptoms may include a mild fever, tiredness, and headache. The most common symptom is the appearance of a rash. The rash has been described as “lacey” and may give the appearance of someone having slapped cheeks. The rash can also develop on the trunk and extremities (arms and legs). Infrequently, persons may also develop problems with their lungs, stomach and/or joints.

How is Fifth disease spread?

It is spread from person to person by direct contact with nose and throat discharges of infected persons. Another way to get Fifth disease is by touching objects that are freshly soiled by the infected person's nose and throat discharges. Less often, it can be spread through blood transfusions, direct contact with contaminated blood, or in utero transmission from mother to fetus.

How long are people contagious?

Fifth disease is moderately contagious. Persons are usually the most contagious before their rash develops. In cases where a person develops aplastic crisis, a more severe effect of Fifth disease, s/he may continue to be contagious for as long as a week after symptoms appear. Persons with weak immune systems may also be contagious for longer periods of time.

Who gets Fifth disease?

Anyone can get Fifth disease. Everyone is at risk of infection, but not everyone who is infected becomes ill. Once a person has had Fifth disease, they will not get it again. Outbreaks may occur in schools and child care centers.

What treatment is available for people with Fifth disease?

No specific treatment is available for Fifth disease. Most infections do not need treatment. If a pregnant woman is exposed to someone with Fifth disease or gets the illness, she should contact her doctor immediately.

Do infected people need to be kept home from school, work or daycare?

Generally, persons with Fifth disease do not need to be kept home. This is because once a person is known to have Fifth disease, as evidenced by the rash, s/he is no longer contagious. In special instances, a person who is hospitalized for Fifth disease may need special care.

How can I protect myself and my family from getting Fifth disease?

- Wash hands frequently with water and soap. (Sanitizing gel may be substituted when hands are not visibly soiled.)
- Clean “dirtied” or contaminated surfaces and soiled items first with soap and water, and then disinfect them with a dilute solution of chlorine-containing bleach (made by mixing approximately ¼ cup of bleach with one gallon of water).