

**MONTGOMERY COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
SCHOOL HEALTH SERVICES
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FIFTH DISEASE (ERYTHEMA INFECTIOSUM)

WHAT IS FIFTH DISEASE?

Fifth disease (also known as “Erythema Infectiosum”) is a mild rash illness that primarily affects school age children. Fifth disease is caused by a human virus called parvovirus B19. In most cases, the disease is diagnosed based on the appearance of typical symptoms. A specific blood test has been developed but is available primarily for pregnant women exposed to Fifth disease. The majority of women infected with parvovirus during pregnancy deliver healthy babies. Rarely, miscarriages and stillbirths have been associated with parvovirus infections, particularly when the infection occurs during the first 20 weeks of pregnancy.

Many people have already had Fifth disease before they reach young adulthood. Most people get infected between 5 and 14 years of age. It is estimated that approximately half the adults in the United States have already been infected with parvovirus B19 and have lifetime immunity.

SYMPTOMS

Symptoms usually occur within 4 to 20 days after a person has been exposed. The characteristic feature of Fifth disease is a red, patchy facial rash (giving a “slapped cheek” appearance) which may spread to the rest of the body in a lace-like pattern. The rash may be preceded by fever, headache, body ache, sore throat, congestion, runny nose, cough, nausea, or diarrhea. In adult cases, joint pains or arthritis is likely to occur. Approximately 25% of cases have no symptoms. In both children and adults, the disease is usually mild, and recovery occurs without problems.

SPREAD

The virus is spread by exposure to airborne droplets from the nose and throat of infected people. The virus is rarely transmitted by blood or blood products. People with Fifth disease are most contagious before the onset of rash. By the time the rash or joint pains develop, spread to others is likely to have already occurred.

TREATMENT

Currently, no specific treatment or vaccine is available.

METHODS OF CONTROL

In general, no control measures are necessary. Since the greatest risk of viral spread occurs before symptoms begin, exclusion of children with Fifth disease from school or daycare is not recommended. Pregnant women and others at risk should consult with their physicians if they have been in contact with a case of Fifth disease. However, the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene does not recommend the routine exclusion of those at risk from settings where Fifth disease is occurring.