

What is fifth disease?

- Fifth disease is an illness.
- It is called "fifth" disease because it was the 5th viral rash discussed in medical textbooks.

What causes fifth disease?

- Fifth disease is caused by a viral infection called Parvovirus B19.

Who can get fifth disease?

- Anyone can get fifth disease in any part of the world.
- It is most common in children ages 5-15.
- Infections happen most often in the late winter and early spring.

What are the symptoms of fifth disease?

- Symptoms may begin like a mild cold, with a slight fever, stuffy or runny nose, and a headache.
- These symptoms usually pass. A rash may show up 6-11 days later.
- The bright red rash usually begins on the face. The cheeks look like they have been slapped.
- The rash can spread in blotches to the trunk, arms, legs, and bottom. The center of the rash may clear up. The rash looks like a net or lace.
- Most children do not have an itch or fever. The rash may itch some older children and adults.
- Sunlight, heat, exercise, and stress can make the rash worse.
- Other symptoms could include swollen glands, red eyes, sore throat, diarrhea, and a rash that looks like blisters or bruises.
- Some older children and adults with fifth disease also may have joint pain or swelling (in the hands, wrists, knees, and ankles).
- Children with leukemia, blood disorders, and a weak immune system may become very ill from fifth disease. They may become anemic, pale, have a fast pulse, and breathe very fast. They will probably feel tired, sick, and have a fever. They often do not have a rash.
- Some people with fifth disease will not have any symptoms, especially adolescents or adults.

Is fifth disease contagious?

- Yes. Fifth disease is contagious.
- It is spread by fluids in the mouth and throat, like when someone coughs or sneezes.
- A pregnant woman can pass the virus to her unborn child. This is not usually a serious problem.
- Infection is spread most easily between people living in the same house or children in the same classroom.
- Fifth disease is contagious for the first 7-11 days of illness. If your child has a rash, she is probably not contagious anymore. It shows the infection is gone.
- Contact the school or daycare if your child has fifth disease.

How is fifth disease treated?

- Fifth disease cannot be treated with antibiotics.
- No medicine is usually necessary because the illness is very mild.
- If your child is itching from her rash, ask the doctor about a lotion or cream to help her.
- Oatmeal baths sometimes help itching.
- Acetaminophen (such as Tylenol) or Ibuprofen (such as Advil) may help adolescents with joint pain.
- Do not use aspirin for children with fifth disease. It could cause serious problems.

How long does fifth disease last?

- The rash fades slowly. It may take 1-3 weeks to clear.
- Older children and adults may have joint pain and swelling for months or even years.

How can fifth disease be prevented?

- There is no vaccine for fifth disease (No shot to prevent the illness).
- You can help prevent the spread of infection in your house by washing your hands often, throwing away used tissues, and not sharing drinking glasses or eating utensils.

When should I call the doctor?

- Call the doctor immediately if you are pregnant and start to get a rash.
- Call the doctor if you are pregnant and have been around someone with a rash or fifth disease.
- Call the doctor if your child has a rash, especially if the rash is red and on the child's face.
- Call the doctor if your child gets a rash and also has a blood disorder, a weak immune system, or cancer.
- Call the doctor if your child has a rash and a fever.

Quick Answers

- Fifth disease is an illness caused by a viral infection.
- It is most common in children ages 5-15.
- Symptoms may begin like a mild cold and then turn into a rash.
- Fifth disease is spread when someone coughs or sneezes.
- No medicine is usually necessary because the illness is very mild.
- It may take 1-3 weeks for the infection to clear.
- There is no vaccine for fifth disease.
- Call the doctor if your child has a rash or if you are pregnant and have been around someone with fifth disease.

References

- CDC. Fifth Disease (Erythema Infectiosum). IntelliHealth. 2001 June 3 (cited 2001 September 27). Available from: URL: <http://www.intelihealth.com/IH/ihtPrint/WSIHW000/20722/18665.html?k=basePrint>
- CDC. Fifth Disease in the Child Care Setting. 1997 January (cited 2001 September 27). Available from: URL: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/hip/abc/facts14.htm>
- Health Square. Erythema Infectiosum. (cited 2001 September 27). Available from: URL: <http://www.healthsquare.com/mc/fgmc0620.htm>
- Rutherford, K M.D. Fifth Disease. KidsHealth. 2001 May (cited 2001 September 27). Available from: URL: http://www.kidshealth.org/PageManager.jsp?dn=KidsHealth&lic=1&ps=107&cat_id=&article_set=22773