

## Fifth Disease (Infectious Erythema) Fact Sheet

### What is Fifth Disease?

It is a viral infection caused by human parvovirus (B19)

### Who gets it?

Anyone can be infected, but the disease seems to occur more often in elementary school-age children

### How is it spread?

The virus is spread by exposure to airborne droplets from the nose and throat of infected people. In addition to being infected by breathing in the droplets, a person can be infected from touching the secretions and then touching their nose, mouth or eyes.

### Symptoms and when do they appear?

Symptoms appear 1-2 weeks after exposure. Some children will experience a low-grade fever and tiredness. By the 3<sup>rd</sup> week a red rash generally appears on the cheeks giving a slapped cheek appearance. Rash may then extend to the body and tends to fade and reappear. The rash may continue to fade and reappear for weeks and may be brought on by exposure to sunlight, heat, exercise, fever or emotional stress. Sometimes the rash is lacy in appearance and may be itchy. Adults may have pain, redness and swelling of the joints. Joint pain and swelling may last 1-3 months.

### When and for how long is a person able to spread the disease?

People with fifth disease appear to be contagious during the week prior to the appearance of the rash. **By the time the rash is evident the person is probably beyond the contagious period and should not be excluded from attending school unless it is recommended by their health care provider.**

## Diagnosis

Blood tests are available to determine whether you have had fifth disease in the past or are currently infected with the parvovirus.

## Treatment

At this time there is no specific treatment and children usually do not require treatment. However, children with other chronic medical conditions may become seriously ill and require medical care when infected with parvovirus B19.

## FIFTH DISEASE AND PREGNANCY

Usually there are no serious problems for a pregnant woman or her baby because of an exposure to fifth disease. About 50% of women have already had fifth disease, so they and their babies are not at risk.

However, the parvovirus can cause the unborn baby to have anemia and the woman may have a miscarriage. This occurs in less than 5% of all pregnant women who are infected with parvovirus and happens more commonly during the first half of pregnancy. There is no evidence that parvovirus causes birth defects or mental retardation.

If you are pregnant and have been in contact with someone who has fifth disease, you may wish to discuss the situation with your healthcare provider. Your healthcare provider can do a blood test to see if you have had fifth disease in the past or if you are currently infected. Treatment will depend on your healthcare provider.