

FIFTH DISEASE: WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE AND HOW TO TREAT

WHAT IS FIFTH DISEASE?

Fifth disease is a viral disease that often results in a red rash on the arms, legs, and cheeks. For this reason, it's also known as "slapped cheek disease." *It's fairly common and mild in most children*, but it can be more severe for pregnant women or anyone with a compromised immune system.

Most doctors advise people with fifth disease to wait out the symptoms. This is because there's currently no medication that'll shorten the course of the disease.

WHAT CAUSES FIFTH DISEASE?

Fifth Disease is caused by Parvovirus B19. *This airborne virus tends to spread through saliva and respiratory secretions among children who are in elementary school.* It's most prevalent in the winter, spring, and early summer. However, it can spread at any time and among people of any age.

For children with healthy immune systems, fifth disease is a common, mild illness that rarely presents lasting consequences.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF FIFTH DISEASE?

According to American Academy of Family Physicians, symptoms tend to appear 4 to 14 days after exposure to the virus. After a few days of having these symptoms, most young people develop a red rash that first appears on the cheeks. The rash often spreads to the arms, legs, and trunk of the body within a few days. The rash may last for weeks. However, by the time you see it, you're usually no longer contagious.

HOW IS FIFTH DISEASE DIAGNOSED?

Doctors can often make the diagnosis by simply looking at your rash.

HOW IF FIFTH DISEASE TREATED?

For most healthy people, no treatment is necessary. If your joints hurt or you have a headache or fever, you may be advised to take acetaminophen (Tylenol) as needed to relieve these symptoms. Otherwise, you'll need to wait for your body to fight off the virus. This usually takes one to three weeks.

You can help the process along by drinking a lot of fluids and getting extra rest. Children can often return to school once the red rash appears since they're no longer contagious.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact your child's Pediatrician.