

# Fifth Disease (Parvovirus B19)

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## What is **Fifth disease**?



**Fifth disease** is a mild rash that occurs most commonly in children. It is caused by infection with human parvovirus B19. This virus infects only humans. Pet dogs or cats may be immunized against “parvovirus,” but these are animal parvoviruses that do not infect humans. Therefore a child can not “catch” parvovirus from a dog or cat and pets can not catch human parvovirus B19 from an ill child.

## What are the symptoms of **Fifth disease**?

**Fifth disease** is characterized by a “slapped-cheek” rash on the face and a lacy red rash on the trunk and limbs. Occasionally, the rash may itch. An ill child may have a low-grade fever, malaise, or a “cold” a few days before the rash breaks out. The child is usually not very ill, and the rash resolves itself in 7 to 10 days.

## Is it contagious?

Yes. A person infected with parvovirus B19 is contagious during the early part of the illness. By the time a child has the characteristic “slapped cheek” rash he or she is probably no longer contagious.

## How do you get it?

**Fifth disease** has been found in the respiratory secretions (e.g., saliva, sputum, or nasal mucus) of infected persons before the onset of the rash, when they appear to have just a cold. The virus is probably spread from person to person by direct contact with those secretions, such as sharing drinking cups and utensils.

## Is **Fifth disease** serious?

**Fifth disease** is usually a mild disease that resolves on its own among children and adults who are otherwise healthy. Joint pain and swelling in adults usually resolve without long-term disability. Individuals with sickle-cell, similar types of chronic anemia, immune deficiencies, leukemia, cancer or organ transplants are at risk for serious illness. Occasionally, serious complications may develop from parvovirus B19 infection during pregnancy. If pregnant, contact your physician if you believe you have been exposed.

**How can you protect yourself and your family from **Fifth disease**?** There is no vaccine or medicine that prevents parvovirus B19 infection. Frequent handwashing is recommended as a practical and probably effective method to decrease the chance of becoming infected.

Any questions, contact Volusia County Health Department, (386) 274-0651 or (386) 274-0633.