

FIFTH DISEASE - ERYTHEMA INFECTIOSUM - HUMAN PAROVIRUS

Fifth Disease is a usually benign viral disease with a rash and perhaps a low grade fever. It may occur sporadically or in epidemics.

SYMPTOMS: About a week after exposure, a low grade fever may occur with no other symptoms. The person may also complain about “not feeling well”. About 1 week after the fever goes away, the characteristic rash of Fifth Disease develops. It looks as though the person’s cheeks were “slapped”. The initial rash is followed in 1 to 4 days by a lace-like rash which appears on the body, arms, and legs. It may fade and recur for 1 to 3 weeks on exposure to sunlight or heat.

DIAGNOSIS: The diagnosis of Fifth Disease is generally determined by the symptoms but a blood test for antibodies against parovirus B19 is available.

TRANSMISSION: Fifth Disease is spread through contact with the respiratory secretions of an infected person. It is communicable before the onset of the rash and probably not afterward. Because it can be transmitted from the mother to the fetus, pregnant women should notify their doctor if they have been exposed to the disease. The physician may recommend antibody testing to determine susceptibility. It may be between 4 to 20 days from the time of exposure until the onset of the rash. Immunosuppressed persons should be informed of the risk of infection.

TREATMENT: Generally none.

SCHOOL IMPLICATIONS: Infection control measures such as frequent hand washing and avoiding sharing eating utensils will prevent the spread of Fifth Disease. Once the rash has occurred, Fifth Disease is probably no longer communicable and the student may return to school if he/she feels well.