

FACT SHEET: Fifth Disease (Parvovirus B19)

March 2024

What is fifth disease?

Fifth disease or erythema infectiosum, is a mild rash infection caused by the human parvovirus B19.

Who can get fifth disease?

Anyone can get fifth disease. However, it is more common in school-aged and younger children than adults. The peak season for Parvovirus B19 infections is late winter and early summer.

What are the symptoms of fifth disease?

The most common manifestation of fifth disease is a benign rash illness of childhood. The rash is the most recognizable feature of the disease. The symptoms start with mild fever, headache, malaise, nausea, runny nose, and muscle pain. A week later, a symmetrical red rash appears on the cheeks, commonly known as a "slapped-cheek" rash. Some people may experience a second rash on their chest, back, buttocks, arms, or legs a few days after the initial rash. The rash may be itchy, especially on the soles and feet. It usually goes away in 7-10 days but can come and go for several weeks. People may also develop pain and swelling in their joints. People who have a weakened immune system are at risk for serious complications from fifth disease.

How soon do symptoms of fifth disease appear?

Symptoms typically develop 4-14 days after the person is infected. However, some cases have been reported where symptoms appeared even as long as 21 days after exposure. The rash and joint symptoms usually occur 2-3 weeks after initial symptoms. People are most contagious in the few days preceding rash.

How is fifth disease spread?

Fifth disease spreads through respiratory secretions, such as saliva, sputum, or nasal mucus when an infected person sneezes or coughs. Infected people are most contagious when they feel like it is "just a cold" and before they develop a rash or joint pain and swelling. People with weakened immune systems may remain infectious for a longer duration. The virus can also

spread through blood or blood products. An infected pregnant woman can pass the virus to her baby.

How is fifth disease diagnosed?

A physician can often diagnose fifth disease by seeing the typical rash during a physical examination. A blood test can also be done to determine if you are immune to or were recently infected with parvovirus B19.

How is fifth disease treated?

Fifth disease is often mild and tends to go away on its own. Treatment of fifth disease usually involves relieving symptoms such as fever, itching, and joint pain or swelling. People with complications are encouraged to see their healthcare provider for treatment.

Can fifth disease be prevented?

There is currently no vaccine available to prevent fifth disease. However, people can take certain measures to limit the spread of the infection. These measures include:

- Washing your hands frequently with soap and water, making sure to scrub your hands for at least 20 seconds.
- Covering your mouth and nose with a tissue when sneezing or coughing. If you don't have a tissue, use your upper sleeve or elbow (not your hands).
- Avoiding touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with your hands.
- Avoiding close contact with infected individuals, especially if you are pregnant.
- Staying at home when feeling sick.

Should a person with fifth disease be excluded from school/daycare?

Yes. A child should stay at home when they have cold-like symptoms and before the rash develops. Once the rash has developed, they can return to school/daycare.

Want more information?

Information about fifth disease and other related health topics can be found at the website [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov). DC Health promotes the health and safety of the District residents. For additional information, please visit dchealth.dc.gov or call (844) 493-2652.

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