

Fifth Disease

Frequently Asked Questions

What is fifth disease?

Fifth disease is a mild rash illness caused by parvovirus B19. It is more common in children than adults. A person usually gets sick within four to 14 days (sometimes up to 20 days) after getting infected with the virus. About 20% of children and adults who get infected with this virus will not have any symptoms.

How do people get fifth disease?

Fifth disease spreads when an infected person coughs or sneezes. You are most contagious (able to spread the disease to others) when it seems like you have "just a cold" and before you get the rash or joint pain and swelling. After you get the rash, you are probably not contagious.

The virus can also spread through blood or blood products. A pregnant woman who is infected with the virus can pass the virus to her baby.

What are the symptoms of fifth disease?

The first symptoms of fifth disease are usually mild such as:

- fever
- sore throat
- runny nose
- headache

After several days, you may get a red rash on your face. This is called "slapped cheek" rash. This rash is the most common symptom of fifth disease. It is more common in children than adults. Some people may get a second rash a few days later on their chest, back, buttocks, or arms and legs. The rash may be itchy, especially on the soles of the feet. The rash usually goes away in seven to 10 days, but may come and go. As the rash starts to go away, it may look lacy.

People with fifth disease can also develop pain and swelling in their joints. This is more common in adults, especially women. Some adults with fifth disease may only have painful joints, usually in the hands, feet, or knees, but no other symptoms. The joint pain usually lasts one to three weeks, but it can last for months or longer. It usually goes away without any long-term problems.

How is fifth disease controlled?

You can reduce your chance of being infected with the virus or infecting others by:

- Washing your hands often with soap and water
- Covering your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze
- Not touching your eyes, nose, or mouth
- Avoiding close contact with people who are sick
- Staying home when you are sick

Health care providers who are pregnant should know about potential risks to their baby and discuss this with their doctor. All health care providers and patients should follow strict infection control practices to prevent parvovirus B19 from spreading.

Should people with fifth disease be kept out of group settings?

No, unless:

- The child has an underlying blood disorder, such as sickle cell disease, or a weak immune system
- Child is unable to participate and staff members are not able to care for the child without compromising the safety of the other children in the group
- Child meets other exclusion criteria, such as fever

After you get the rash, you are probably not contagious. So, it is usually safe for you to go back to work or for your child to return to school or a child care center.

Are there any risks for pregnancy and fifth disease?

Fifth disease is usually not a problem for pregnant women and their babies. About 50% of pregnant women are immune to the virus. So, these women and their babies are usually protected from getting the virus and fifth disease.

Pregnant women who are not immune usually do not have serious complications after they are exposed to others with fifth disease. They usually have only mild illness. Also, their babies usually do not have any problems. However, sometimes a baby will develop severe anemia, and the woman may have a miscarriage. But, this is not common. It happens in less than 5% of all pregnant women with parvovirus B19 infection and more commonly during the first half of pregnancy. Pregnant women who are not immune and are not currently infected with parvovirus B19 may want to stay away from people with fifth disease.

If you are pregnant, you may want to talk with your doctor if you:

- have been exposed to someone with fifth disease
- have an illness that might be caused by parvovirus B19 infection
- were recently infected with parvovirus B19

There is no single recommended way to monitor pregnant women with parvovirus B19 infection. Your doctor may recommend additional prenatal visits, blood tests, and ultrasounds.

Can pregnant women go to their workplace if there is an outbreak of fifth disease?

Pregnant women may choose to continue going to their workplace if there is an outbreak of fifth disease happening. However, if you are not immune to parvovirus B19 and are not currently infected, you may want to stay away from people with fifth disease while you are pregnant. Talk with your family, healthcare provider, and employer to decide what is best for you.

Healthcare providers who are pregnant should know about the potential risks to their baby and discuss this with their doctor. All healthcare providers and patients should follow strict infection control practices to prevent the parvovirus B19 from spreading.

Is there a test for parvovirus B19 during pregnancy?

A blood test for parvovirus B19 can show if you

- are immune to this virus and have no recent sign of infection
- are not immune and have never been infected
- have had a recent infection

Where can I get more information on fifth disease?

- Your health care provider
- Your local health department
- NJ Department of Health www.nj.gov/health
- Centers for Disease Control & Prevention www.cdc.gov/parvovirusb19/index.html

This information is intended for educational purposes only and is not intended to replace consultation with a health care professional. Adapted from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention