

Fifth disease

FACT SHEET

What is fifth disease?

Common viral infection with rash occurring 4 to 14 days (up to 21 days) after the start of the viral infection.



What are signs & symptoms?

Common symptoms are fever, headache, and sore throat. Sometimes people experience itchiness, cough, diarrhea and/or vomiting, runny nose, and joint aches. The red “slapped cheek” rash appears 1 to 3 weeks after the symptoms of illness. The “slapped cheek” rash is quickly followed by a lacelike-appearing rash that moves from the trunk to arms, buttocks, and thighs. The rash may disappear and reappear for weeks after exposure to heat. However, once the rash appears, the person is no longer contagious and does not feel ill. Some individuals can be infected and never have any signs or symptoms of illness. The disease may be severe in people with sickle cell disease, certain blood disorders, and those with compromised immune systems.

How does fifth disease spread?

Fifth disease is spread by respiratory (droplet) route. When a person talks, coughs, or sneezes, large droplets form that can land on or be rubbed into the eyes, nose, or mouth. Rarely, people may contract it from blood or blood products or a baby can be infected before birth by an infected pregnant mother. Use good hand hygiene at all time. Sanitize contaminated items. Cover nose and mouth when sneezing or coughing. Properly dispose of tissues containing nose and throat secretions.



Fifth disease in schools

Pregnant teachers, caregivers, and pregnant mothers of children in child care and school settings should practice good hand hygiene to reduce their risk of infection that could harm a fetus. Women who are pregnant and expect to have contact with children in a group care setting should consult with their health professional about their immune status and risk of infection. A blood test can be performed to see if they are already immune to this virus. A confirmed immunity level may alleviate concern about the risk to their baby.

Exclusion

A person does not need to be excluded unless they are unable to participate and staff cannot provide care without compromising their ability to care for others in the group, or the child meets other exclusion criteria, such as fever and behavior change.

