
Fifth Disease

Description: Fifth disease is a mild childhood illness that mainly occurs in children 4-10 years of age. It is caused by a virus. Fifth disease occurs year 'round, but outbreaks are more common in the late winter and early spring.

Symptoms: May include fever, mild flu-like symptoms and a rash. The rash begins on the face and gives a "slapped-cheek" appearance. The rash usually spreads to the trunk and extremities and may cause itching. The rash disappears within one week, but may reappear during periods of exercise, exposure to sunlight or emotional upset. The rash may come and go for several weeks.

How it is Spread: By direct or indirect contact with respiratory secretions and droplets.

Incubation: Usually 4-14 days, may be as long as 20 days.

How Long Can a Person Pass the Infection To Others? A person with fifth disease is most contagious before the symptoms occur (about five days prior to symptoms). A person may spread the infection for two days after the rash appears. It is not necessary to exclude a child with fifth disease from child care or school unless the child has a fever or is uncomfortable.

Responsibilities of Parents and Caregivers: Caregivers should inform parents of children who are exposed.

Control of Spread:

- Wash hands after contact with soiled tissues and articles, and after contact with nose and throat discharges.
- Dispose of tissues soiled with nose and throat discharges.
- Use proper cleaning and sanitation guidelines (See Cleaning and Sanitation).

Treatment: No specific treatment. The disease usually goes away on its own.

Comments: People with an immune deficiency, sickle cell disease or other blood disorders may be at risk for complications of infection. The risk for pregnant women is very low; however, pregnant women should consult their physician if exposed to an ill child.