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## Children's Health

### Topic Overview

#### What is fifth disease?

Fifth disease is a very common childhood illness. Adults can get it too. It is sometimes called slapped-cheek disease because of the rash that some people get on the face. You spread the disease by coughing and sneezing.

Fifth disease is usually a mild illness that lasts a few weeks. It can be more serious for people with weak immune systems or blood disorders, such as sickle cell disease. It can also cause problems for the baby (fetus) of a pregnant woman who gets the illness, although this isn't common.


#### What causes fifth disease?

Fifth disease is caused by a virus called human parvovirus B19. (Only humans can catch and spread fifth disease. Although there are other parvoviruses that infect animals, you cannot catch these from your pet or any other animal.)

As a rule, people can spread fifth disease only while they have flu-like symptoms and before they get a rash. Usually, by the time the rash appears, you can no longer spread the disease to anyone else. Some people, such as those who have weak immune systems or blood disorders, may be able to spread the disease for a longer time.

#### What are the symptoms?

Symptoms usually appear 2 to 3 weeks after exposure to the virus. Early symptoms are similar to the flu—runny nose, sore throat, headache—and may be so mild that you don't notice them.

The rash  comes several days later, first on the face and later over the rest of the body. It may be itchy. The rash usually fades within 5 days. For a few weeks, the rash may come back when you are out in the sun, get

too warm, or are under stress. This doesn't mean the disease is worse.

Some people also get pain in their joints. This can last for several weeks or even months.

Not all people with fifth disease get a rash or feel sick.

#### How is fifth disease diagnosed?

Your doctor can diagnose fifth disease by doing a physical exam and asking questions about your medical history. The disease is easier to diagnose if you have the rash.

Tests aren't usually needed, but they may be done in some cases to confirm that you have fifth disease.

#### How is it treated?

Fifth disease usually goes away on its own. Antibiotics don't help with fifth disease, because the illness is caused by a virus, not a bacteria.

Home treatment can help with symptoms until you feel better.

- Use acetaminophen (such as Tylenol) or ibuprofen (such as Advil or Motrin) for fever, headache, or joint pain. Follow all directions on the label. If you give medicine to your baby, follow your doctor's advice about what amount to give. **Do not give aspirin to anyone younger than 20** because of the risk of Reye syndrome.
- Get extra rest.
- Drink plenty of fluids.

Try not to spread the illness. Wash your hands often, and stay home from school, day care, or work. (When the rash appears, you can return.)

If you are pregnant or have a weak immune system or certain blood disorders, see your doctor. You may need extra checkups, tests, or treatment.



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