

Fifth Disease

What teachers need to know

What is Fifth Disease?

Fifth disease, caused by parvovirus B19, is a viral illness distinguished by a mild rash. It is most common in school-age children and will infect around 50% of people throughout their lifetime. While parvoviruses are common in animals, they cannot be spread to humans. Likewise, parvovirus B19 only infects humans.

Symptoms of Fifth Disease

Early signs of the illness include bright red cheeks, which appear as if the child has been slapped on both sides of the face, followed by a lacy rash on the trunk and limbs. Fever may be present and occasionally the rash may itch. Immunocompromised persons are at risk for developing anemia.

In adults, joint pain may be the only sign of infection.

How Fifth Disease is spread

This illness is spread through respiratory secretions of infected persons, before the onset of rash. Infected individuals may appear to have a cold, during which point they can spread the virus through saliva or nasal mucus. A person usually becomes ill 4-14 days after infection with the virus.

Prevention

Individuals are usually no longer contagious after rash appears. Thus, the window of opportunity for prevention lies prior to the appearance of a rash. Frequent hand hygiene should be practiced and children should avoid sharing utensils and drinks.

Treatment

The rash seen with Fifth Disease resolves on its own among healthy children and adults. Symptomatic relief, such as fever or pain, may be treated with over-the-counter medications such as ibuprofen. Immunocompromised individuals should contact their primary care provider to assess their individual needs. Infection with parvovirus B19 does lead to lifetime immunity.

Pregnant Women

About 50% of women have already been infected with parvovirus B19 prior to pregnancy and are thus immune to infection. Usually, if infection does occur, pregnant women experience mild illness with no affect on the baby. However, in less than 5% of infections, there is a risk for severe anemia in the unborn child and miscarriage in the first half of pregnancy. Talk to your provider to determine your risk and a plan that is best for you. Hand hygiene is the best deterrent against infection.

Prevention Tips

Wash your hands Frequent hand washing, either with soap and water or an alcohol-based rub, may prevent the spread of infection

Do not share utensils or drinks Do not let children share drinks or eating utensils as good routine practice.

Sanitize shared objects As routine practice, sanitize communal items such as toys, doorknobs, desks, etc.

Children should not be excluded from school Otherwise healthy children will resolve the infection on their own. Once a rash has appeared, the child is no longer contagious. Exclusion from school is not recommended.

