

## What is Fifth Disease?



Fifth disease is a mild rash illness caused by parvovirus B19. This disease is also called erythema infectiosum. It is more common in children than adults. A person usually gets sick within 4 to 14 days (sometimes up to 20 days) after infection with parvovirus B19. About 20% of children and adults who get infected with this virus will not have any symptoms.

## How is it Spread?

Parvovirus B19 spreads through respiratory secretions (such as saliva, sputum, or nasal mucus) when an infected person coughs or sneezes. When it seems like a person has "just a cold" and before getting the rash or joint pain and swelling, a person is the most contagious.

The contagious period for fifth disease is different from many other rash illnesses. For example, people with measles can spread the measles virus when they have the rash. However, people with fifth disease who have weakened immune systems may be contagious for a longer amount of time.

Parvovirus B19 can also spread through blood or blood products. A pregnant woman who is infected with parvovirus B19 can pass the virus to her baby.

## Signs and Symptoms

The first symptoms of fifth disease are typically mild and nonspecific and are usually:

- fever
- runny nose
- headache

Fifth disease got its name because it was fifth in a list of historical classifications of common skin rash illnesses in children.

After several days, a red rash may appear on the face. This is called "slapped cheek rash". This rash is the most recognized feature of fifth disease. It is more common in children than adults. Some people may get a second rash a few days later on the chest, back, buttocks, or arms and legs. The rash may be itchy, especially on the soles of the feet. The rash can vary in intensity and may come and go for several weeks. It usually goes away in 7 to 10 days, but it can last several weeks. As the rash starts to go away, it may look lacy.

People with fifth disease can also develop pain and swelling in the joints (polyarthropathy syndrome). 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 1 to 3 weeks, but it can last for months or longer. It usually goes away without any long-term problems.

## Diagnosis

Healthcare providers can often diagnose fifth disease just by seeing "slapped cheek" rash on a patient's face. A blood test can also be done to determine if susceptible or immune to parvovirus B19 infection or if recently infected.

Once a person recovers from fifth disease, they develop immunity that protects from parvovirus B19 infection in the future.

## Treatment

Fifth disease is usually mild and will go away on its own. Children and adults who are otherwise healthy usually recover completely. Treatment usually involves relieving symptoms, such as fever, itching, and joint pain and swelling.

People who have complications from fifth disease should see their healthcare provider for medical treatment. There is no vaccine or medicine that can prevent parvovirus B19 infection.

## Prevention

A person can reduce the chance of being infected with parvovirus B19 or infecting others by:

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

After getting the rash, a person is not usually contagious and it is safe to go back to work or for a child to return to school or a child care center.



***For more sources of information on this topic visit:***

ST. CLAIR COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT [www.scchealth.co](http://www.scchealth.co)

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES [www.michigan.gov/mdhhs](http://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs)

CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)