

Fifth Disease

What is fifth disease?

Fifth Disease is a mild rash illness caused by a virus called human parvovirus B19. Fifth disease is more common in children but can infect adults as well.

What are the signs and symptoms of fifth disease?

It can take anywhere from 4 to 20 days from the time the virus gets into the body before symptoms start to show. Some people who are infected with fifth disease do not show any symptoms. For most people, fifth disease begins as a mild illness with muscle aches, headache, tiredness and sometimes a fever. A rash can appear 7 to 10 days later.

- Often children with fifth disease will develop a "slapped-cheek" rash on the face and a lacy red itchy rash on the trunk and limbs. Fifth disease does not cause serious illness in most people and the rash resolves in 7 to 10 days.
- Adults can develop a rash and/or joint pain and swelling. The joint pain and swelling usually resolve.

People with chronic anemia, immune system deficiencies, leukemia, cancer, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) or organ transplants are at risk for serious illness due to parvovirus. Occasionally parvovirus B19 infections during pregnancy may lead to complications.

How is Fifth Disease spread?

The virus is found in the fluids of the nose and mouth. It is spread person to person by direct contact with these fluids; for example, when sneezing and coughing or by touching a used facial tissue or sharing cups and utensils.

When is it contagious?

A person infected with parvovirus B19 is contagious to others before the rash appears. By the time the rash appears the person is no longer contagious. Children with fifth disease can return to school and will not spread the infection to others.

Treatment

- There are no drugs to treat Fifth Disease. Treatment of symptoms such as fever, pain, or itching is usually all that is recommended.
- Adults with joint pain and swelling may need to rest, restrict their activities, and take over the counter medicines such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen to relieve symptoms.
- People with underlying health conditions may need special medical care to help their bodies get rid of the infection.
- If a pregnant woman becomes infected, the doctor will continue to monitor the pregnancy for signs of problems. If your doctor sees signs that your unborn baby is developing complications, your doctor will determine the appropriate course of action.

Fifth Disease and Pregnancy: The Risk

Sometimes Fifth Disease during pregnancy may lead to complications. Women who have had Fifth Disease in the past will have antibodies to protect them from getting Fifth Disease again. These women do not need to be concerned about it during pregnancy. About 50 percent of pregnant women are immune to Fifth Disease.

There is some risk to the developing baby if a pregnant woman who has never had fifth disease is exposed during pregnancy. In very rare cases the virus can affect the unborn baby's ability to make red blood cells, sometimes leading to a dangerous form of anemia. The risk is lower for exposures in the second half of pregnancy than in the first half.

Prevention

There is no vaccine or medication that prevents infection with parvovirus B19. You can lower the chance of getting sick with Fifth Disease by doing the following:

Wash your hands. Frequent hand washing is recommended to decrease the chance of becoming infected.

The six steps to good hand washing are:

1. Wet hands with warm running water.
2. Put liquid soap on hands.
3. Lather hands and scrub for 20 seconds.
4. Rinse under running water.
5. Dry your hands with paper towels.
6. Use the paper towel to turn off the taps.

If your hands are not visibly dirty, an alcohol-based hand rub can be added to your hand washing routine:

1. Apply the sanitizer to your hands. Use an amount about the size of a dime.
2. Rub your hands together until the hand rub is gone. Hands will feel dry in about 15 seconds.

Cover your cough. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue every time you cough or sneeze. Dispose of used facial tissues properly. If you don't have a tissue, sneeze or cough into your sleeve.

Stay home when ill. Children in group settings should stay home if they are not able to participate. Routine exclusion from childcare centres and school is not likely to prevent the spread of disease so is not recommended.

Do not share eating utensils. Since Fifth Disease is spread through secretions of the mouth or nose it is important not to share any eating utensils or cups with others.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Infectious Disease Control Team at 519-663-5317 ext. 2330 or go to www.healthunit.com

Reference:

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