



Island County Public Health

Communicable Disease Program

Fifth Disease

You are being provided with this fact sheet:

- ☐ **because you or your child may have been exposed to Fifth Disease.** If you believe your child has Fifth Disease contact your healthcare provider. Notify your childcare provider or school if a diagnosis of HFMD is made.
- ☐ **for informational purposes only.**

What is fifth disease?

Fifth disease is a mild rash illness caused by a virus. It is also known as “slapped cheek disease” or erythema infectiosum. It is called fifth disease because common rash diseases in children were originally organized by number. It occurs most commonly in children. The virus that causes the disease is called parvovirus B19. Parvoviruses in animals are different than those in humans. Cats and dogs cannot spread fifth disease.

What are the symptoms of fifth disease?

The classic symptoms of fifth disease are a bright red rash on the cheeks that makes them appear to be “slapped.” A couple days later, the rash typically spreads, and red blotches (usually lighter in color) extend down to the trunk to the arms, buttocks, and legs. As the centers of the blotches begin to clear, the rash takes on a lacy net-like appearance. The rash may be accompanied by itching, especially on the feet. The rash usually resolves in 7 to 10 days but may recur for 1 to 3 weeks upon exposure to heat or sunlight. Adults who get fifth disease may develop the typical rash seen in children as well as joint pain and swelling. Other mild symptoms include fever*, headache, and runny nose. Symptoms usually appear 4 to 14 days after exposure. Some individuals may have the disease and be contagious, but never show symptoms.

How is fifth disease spread?

Fifth disease is spread from person to person through body fluids such as saliva. People with fifth disease can spread the virus during the week before the rash appears when the symptoms are cold-like. Objects such as used tissues, mouthed toys, drinking cups, and utensils can spread the virus. By the time someone develops the rash, they are no longer spreading the virus. It usually takes between 4 – 14 days for an exposed person to become ill after being infected with the virus.

What are the complications associated with fifth disease?

While most people who have fifth disease have a mild infection, some people may have more serious illness. When pregnant women are infected in their first trimester, there is a slightly higher risk of miscarriage. Some individuals with sickle-cell disease, chronic anemia, or immune system deficiencies may become seriously ill and require medical attention.

Who can get fifth disease?

Anyone can become infected with the virus, but it is more common in elementary school-aged children. After recovering from an infection, a person is immune, meaning he/she cannot be infected again. About 50% of adults are immune because they have already been infected with the virus.

How is fifth disease diagnosed?

Usually, a healthcare provider can diagnose fifth disease based on the symptoms. If needed, a blood test can be done to confirm the diagnosis.

What is the treatment for fifth disease?

There is no specific treatment for fifth disease. Your healthcare provider will tell you how to treat the symptoms of fifth disease. Pregnant women or patients with anemia or immune deficiencies may require specialized treatment, but this is mostly to manage symptoms. There is currently no vaccine to prevent fifth disease.

What can be done to prevent the spread of fifth disease?

- Use good handwashing techniques often.
- Avoid sharing personal articles that may be contaminated with saliva, such as drinking cups, eating utensils, and mouthed toys.
- Use a sanitizing solution on toys and surfaces.
- Dispose of facial tissues properly after each use. Teach children to cover their mouth and nose with a tissue or their elbow or upper sleeve when they cough or sneeze and to perform hand hygiene promptly.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Avoid close contact with people who are ill.
- Stay home when sick.

Exclude from group setting?

Excluding a child diagnosed with fifth disease from school or childcare is not necessary because the child is no longer contagious once the rash appears. Ensure that pregnant woman who may have been exposed are aware of the potential risk.

* Fever is defined as a temperature above 101 F (38.3 C) by any method or above 100.4 F (38.0 C) for infants younger than 2 months old.

Adapted from materials developed by Snohomish County Health Department and CDC.

References

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