



Fifth Disease

What is fifth disease?

Fifth disease is a mild rash illness caused by a virus called parvovirus B19.

What are the symptoms?

The first symptoms of fifth disease are usually mild and may include

- fever
- runny nose
- headache



This rash is the most recognized feature of fifth disease.

After several days, some people may get a red rash on their face. People may also develop a second rash a few days later on their chest, back, buttocks, or arms and legs. The rash may be itchy, especially on the soles of the feet. The rash usually goes away in 7 to 10 days, but it can come and go for several weeks. People with fifth disease can also develop pain and swelling in their joints. 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.

Is fifth disease dangerous?

Fifth disease is usually mild for healthy people. People with weakened immune systems caused by leukemia, cancer, organ transplants, or HIV infection are at risk for serious complications from fifth disease.

How is fifth disease spread?

Parvovirus B19 spreads through respiratory secretions, such as saliva, sputum, or nasal mucus, when an infected person coughs or sneezes. 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.

Who gets fifth disease?

Anyone can get it but it is more common in children than adults.

How is fifth disease diagnosed?

Often, healthcare providers can diagnose fifth disease by physical examination (appearance of rash). A blood test can also be done to determine if you are protected against parvovirus B19 infection. This blood test is particularly helpful for pregnant women who may have been exposed to parvovirus B19 and are suspected to have fifth disease.

Should pregnant women worry about fifth disease?

Fifth disease is usually not a problem for pregnant women and their babies. About half of pregnant women are immune to parvovirus B19. Pregnant women who are not immune usually have only mild illness if they are exposed to fifth disease. The babies of infected pregnant mothers usually do not have any problems. Rarely, a baby will develop severe anemia (a condition in which the blood doesn't have enough healthy red blood cells) caused by its mother's infection with fifth disease, and the woman may have a miscarriage. This happens less than 5% of the time among all pregnant women with parvovirus B19 infection, and it happens more commonly during the first half of pregnancy.

How can I prevent fifth disease?

There is no vaccine or medicine that can prevent parvovirus B19 infection. You can reduce your chance of being infected or spreading it by

- washing your hands often with soap and water
- covering your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze
- not touching your eyes, nose, or mouth
- avoiding close contact with people who are sick
- staying home when you are sick

Is there treatment for fifth disease?

Fifth disease is usually mild and will go away on its own. 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.

Can you get fifth disease more than once?

No. Once you have had fifth disease, you cannot get it again.



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