

Fifth Disease



Fifth disease, which is especially common in kids between the ages of 5 and 15, usually produces a distinctive red rash on the face that makes a child appear to have a "slapped cheek." The rash then spreads to the trunk, arms, and legs.

About Fifth Disease

Fifth disease is actually just a viral illness that most kids recover from quickly and without complications. It occurs everywhere in the world. Outbreaks tend to happen in the late winter and early spring.

Signs and Symptoms

Fifth disease begins with a low-grade fever, headache, and mild cold-like symptoms (a stuffy or runny nose). These symptoms pass, and the illness seems to be gone until a rash appears a few days later.

The bright red rash usually begins on the face. Then, the rash spreads and red blotches (usually lighter in color) extend down to the trunk, arms, and legs. As the blotches begin to clear, the rash takes on a lacy net-like appearance. Most kids with a rash do not look sick and no longer have fever. It may take 1 to 3 weeks for the rash to completely clear, and during that time it may seem to worsen until it finally fades away entirely. Children with the rash but no fever may continue to attend school.

Contagiousness

A person with Fifth Disease is most contagious before the rash appears. Kids usually aren't contagious once the rash appears.

Prevention

There is no vaccine for fifth disease, and no real way to prevent spreading the virus. Frequent hand washing, is always a good idea since it can help prevent the spread of many infections.

Diagnosis

Doctors can usually diagnose fifth disease by the distinctive rash on the face and body.

Treatment

Fifth disease is caused by a virus, and it cannot be treated with antibiotics. This is such a mild illness that no medicine is necessary. Usually, kids with fifth disease feel fairly well and need little home treatment other than rest.

Complications

Most kids with fifth disease recover with no complications.

When to Call the Doctor

Call the doctor if your child develops a rash, especially if the rash is widespread over the body or accompanied by other symptoms.

If you're pregnant and develop a rash or if you've been exposed to someone with fifth disease (or to anyone with an unusual rash), call your obstetrician.