

## FACT SHEET

### Fifth Disease (Erythema Infectiosum)

Erythema infectiosum is a viral disease also called fifth disease. It is caused by the virus human parvovirus B19 that produces a red rash. It is most common in childhood; child usually is not very ill and the rash resolves with about a week.

**Symptoms:** Mild rash with a "slapped cheek" on the face, a lacy red rash on the body that may itch. Low-grade fevers, fatigue or a cold may occur prior to the rash. Adults may have no symptoms or can develop a rash, joint (hands, wrists, knees) pain, and/or swelling. Typically both side of the body are affected and symptoms usually resolve in a week but may last for several months. Approximately half of the adults who have been infected with parvovirus B19 develop immunity to the virus and cannot get fifth disease.

Serious illness called aplastic crisis may develop in people with sickle cell anemia, see your physician. If a woman is infected in the first half of pregnancy there is a risk of fetal infection. B19 infection in pregnancy can lead to extensive edema of the fetus. For details, please ask your doctor or visit the CDC website for "Parvovirus B19 Infection and Pregnancy Infection". Immunocompromised persons can progress to severe, chronic anemia.

**Spread:** The virus is believed to be spread via respiratory secretions (saliva, sputum, or nasal mucus) of the ill person. It also can be spread from mother to fetus. Rarely, the virus is transmitted by blood and blood products (especially clotting factor treatments). In households about 50% of susceptible persons that are exposed may become infected; in school outbreaks about 10-60% of students may become infected with fifth disease.

**Incubation:** Susceptible persons typically become ill 4-14 days after infection, but may be up to 20 days after being infected with the virus.

**Contagious Period:** For most people they are most contagious before the rash appears. Once the rash is visible, these people are probably no longer communicable. People with aplastic crisis are communicable up to one week after onset.

Immunocompromised people may be contagious for weeks to months after infection.

**Precautions:** Hand washing and covering your mouth when you cough or sneeze are the most affective precautions to decrease chances of getting infected.

**Diagnosis and Treatment:** Most children and adults with B19 infections do not need treatment other than for fever, pain or itching. The illness is usually self-limited and probably produces lifelong immunity. People with anemia and immunosuppression may

be treated. For people whose B19 infection led to severe illness, blood transfusion and hospitalization may be necessary. For people with immunosuppression, intravenous immunoglobulin may be needed.

**Prevention:**

There is no vaccine available for this infection. Exclusion of persons with Fifth Disease from work, day care or schools to prevent the spread is not likely as the person is only contagious before the rash appears.