

# **FIFTH DISEASE**

## **(Erythema Infectiosum; Human Parvovirus B19 Infection)**

### **What is Fifth Disease?**

Fifth Disease is a mild, self-limiting rash illness caused by a virus (parvovirus B19) and primarily affects school age children. Occasionally, the rash may itch.

### **How is it spread?**

It is spread mainly through contact with respiratory secretions from the nose and throat of infected individuals and their saliva. It can be passed from mother to fetus. It can also be spread through transfusion of blood and blood products, and is resistant to inactivation by various methods.

### **What are the signs and symptoms?**

Fifth Disease is a mild, lace-like rash occurring on the body, arms and legs; usually with low grade fever. It usually presents with 'cold-like' symptoms (malaise and fatigue, runny nose). Diagnosis is made when the most striking symptom, the redness of the cheeks ('slapped-cheek'), appears. This rash usually resolves in seven (7) to ten (10) days, but may re-appear and fade away with changes in temperature, sunlight and emotional stress for up to six (6) weeks.

### **What is the incubation period and how long is it communicable?**

The incubation period varies from four (4) to twenty (20) days. It is more communicable in the week before the rash appears and is probably not after the rash begins.

### **How can Fifth Disease be prevented?**

There is no vaccine at this time. Approximately 50% of adults have had the disease and have developed lifelong immunity.

Since individuals are infectious before the rash appears, the best prevention is to practice good hygiene: wash hands frequently with soap and water and cover nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing. Children should be taught to blow their noses into a tissue, discard the tissue into the trash, and then wash their hands with soap and water. Children and adults should also avoid sharing drinking cups or utensils.

### **How is it treated?**

Under normal circumstances, treatment of symptoms such as fever, pain, or itching is all that is needed. Antibiotics are not useful because this is a viral disease.

### **What should I do about it?**

Persons who have these symptoms should see their physicians, in particular, people with sickle-cell disease, immuno-compromised, or pregnant since they are at risk for serious complications. Children and adults with fifth disease should **NOT** be excluded from schools or childcare centers unless they have a fever. When their fever subsides and they feel well, they can return to school and daycare. The SRCHD Epidemiology Program may change exclusion rules at any time.

Clusters of two or more persons are considered a **reportable disease** to the Santa Rosa County Health Department (SRCHD).

For more information, please contact the SRCHD's Epidemiology Program at 850-983-5200.

