

FIFTH DISEASE: "SLAPPED CHEEK DISEASE"

*****We have had a few elementary students who have contracted Fifth Disease. Please read the following information regarding the viral disease. If your child is running a fever, we ask that you keep him/her home from school.*****

WHAT IS FIFTH DISEASE?

It is a harmless viral illness caused by Parvovirus. It is so called because it was the fifth fever and rash illness identified (along with chickenpox, measles, etc.). It is also called "slapped cheek disease" because of its major distinguishing characteristic – bright red cheeks that look like the child has been slapped. It can also infect adults.

WHAT DOES FIFTH DISEASE LOOK LIKE?

- Bright red cheeks with pale skin around the mouth.
- A red lacy or bumpy rash can occur on the chest, abdomen, and back, which can then spread to the extremities. It can be itchy.
- This face and body rash can fluctuate from better to worse with temperature and weather changes. Sunlight exposure can make the rash flare up.
- This rash can sometimes come and go for several months.
- Fever is present in 25% of cases.
- Mild cold symptoms may occur.
- Some people will experience headache, body aches, and muscle aches.
- Some cases will have general aches and fever, which resolve, then have the rash break out 1 – 3 weeks later.
- Some children will only have a rash, with no other symptoms or fever.
- Adults, especially women, may experience joint pain and swelling.
- Some cases can come and then resolve without anyone even detecting it.

IS IT CONTAGIOUS AND HOW DO I CATCH IT?

It is most contagious the day before the rash starts, the day before any fever starts, and for as long as any fever is present. Once the fever is gone for 24 hours your child is no longer contagious, even though the rash will continue for a few days to a few months. If your child does not have a fever, then she is no longer contagious the day after the rash starts.

The virus is transmitted from a cough, runny nose, or saliva. Only humans are affected. It's not caught from animals.

The incubation period (the time from when you are exposed to the time you will become sick) is 4 – 14 days, sometimes as long as 21 days.

I AM PREGNANT. CAN THIS INFECTION HARM THE FETUS?

If a pregnant woman is exposed to this illness for the first time in her life, and she comes down with the symptoms of the illness, then there is a very small risk of a miscarriage. This risk is much greater during the first half of pregnancy. However, the good news is that the vast majority of adults have acquired this infection at some point during their lives, and are therefore immune to it. A pregnant woman who is exposed to this illness can speak with her OB about testing for it.

IS THERE A TEST FOR FIFTH DISEASE?

Yes, there is a blood test, but it is rarely used in children since it is not very important to know for certain if your child has it. The test can be done for pregnant women to see if she is immune to or has been recently infected with the virus.

IS THERE A TREATMENT FOR FIFTH DISEASE?

No. Simply treat any symptoms that are bothering your child. If your child is uncomfortable from itching, use Benadryl liquid. This may make your child drowsy, but it can really help the itching. Click on [Benadryl](#) for dosing.

IS THERE ANY IMMEDIATE HARM FROM FIFTH DISEASE?

For normal healthy adults and children, this disease is self-limiting and will resolve with no problems, except for a few adults (mostly women) who may have some uncomfortable joint pains and swelling for several weeks.

There is one situation to be aware of. If you or your child has sickle cell anemia or any other hemolytic anemia, or has an immune deficiency disorder, this virus can cause a severe, life-threatening sudden anemia. If your child has this risk, and has been exposed to fifth disease, see your doctor.

