

What is fifth disease?

Fifth disease is a mild rash illness. It clears up on its own among children and adults who are otherwise healthy.

Who gets fifth disease?

Anyone can be infected, but the disease seems to occur more often in elementary school-age children.

How do you get fifth disease?

It is spread by exposure to airborne droplets from the nose and throat of infected people.

What are the symptoms and when do they appear?

One to two weeks after exposure, some children will experience a low-grade fever and tiredness. By the third week, a red rash generally appears on the cheeks giving a slapped face appearance. A lacy red rash may appear on the body. It can fade and reappear for one to three weeks or longer after being exposed to sunlight or heat (e.g., bathing). Sometimes the rash may be itchy. Some children may have vague signs of illness or no symptoms at all.

**The Health Department does not
diagnose fifth disease.**

When and for how long is a person able to spread the illness?

People with fifth disease seem to be contagious during the week before the rash appears. By the time the rash is evident, the person is probably beyond the contagious period.

How is fifth disease treated?

There is no specific treatment for fifth disease. Fever should be treated with non-aspirin products. People should also get plenty of rest and fluids.

Do I need to keep my child home from school?

Since a child is contagious before the rash appears, someone with fifth disease may attend childcare or school while having the rash.

How can fifth disease be prevented?

There is no vaccine to prevent fifth disease. In order to limit the spread of the virus, use a tissue to cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze. Wash hands often throughout the day.

What's with the name?

Historically, erythema infectiosum (Fifth's Disease) is considered the fifth rash-producing pediatric infection. The other four are measles, german measles, scarlet fever and Roseola.

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for talking with a health care provider. If you have any questions about fifth disease or think you may have it, call your health care provider.