

Fifth disease

(slapped cheek syndrome, erythema infectiosum, human parvovirus B19)

Fifth disease is a common viral infection that usually causes a mild illness in children.

About 20% of infected children will have no symptoms. In others, symptoms include mild fever and muscle aches, followed 2 to 5 days later by a red rash on the face (hence the name 'slapped cheek syndrome') and a lacy red rash on the trunk and limbs. The rash can sometimes be itchy. It will usually disappear after 7 to 10 days, but can come and go for several weeks, often reappearing in response to heat.

Fifth disease is a type of parvovirus. Animals such as cats and dogs can have other types of parvovirus infections, but they cannot catch human parvovirus from people, and they cannot pass their parvovirus infections to people.

How it spreads

Fifth disease spreads through airborne droplets, contact with infected saliva or mucus, or transmission to the baby during pregnancy.

Exclusion period

Not excluded – people with fifth disease can attend the service.

Risks in pregnancy

If you catch fifth disease in the first 20 weeks of pregnancy, it can affect the baby. In less than 5% of cases, the baby develops a low red blood cell count (anaemia), resulting in miscarriage. Babies that survive if the mother is infected do not have birth defects.

Actions for educators and other staff

Ensure staff and children have good respiratory and hand hygiene.

Ensure staff use appropriate cleaning practices, as described in the *Staying healthy* guidelines.

Actions for parents and carers

Keep your child at home until their symptoms have gone.

Encourage your child to wash their hands regularly.

Teach your child to cough or sneeze into a tissue, then throw the tissue into a bin and wash their hands. If there are no tissues nearby, teach them to cough or sneeze into their inner elbow instead of their hands.

Clean surfaces that your child has touched, sneezed on, or coughed on to reduce the risk of the infection spreading to others at home.

More information about fifth disease

See healthdirect for more information on prevention, diagnosis and treatment of fifth disease (healthdirect.gov.au/fifth-disease).

To find out if a child needs medical help:

- use the online symptom checker (healthdirect.gov.au/symptom-checker)
- speak to a registered nurse by calling the 24-hour health advice hotline on 1800 022 222.