



Office of School Health

Dear Parent or Guardian,

An individual in your child's school has been diagnosed with fifth disease, an infection caused by Parvovirus B19.

This virus is spread from person to person by contact with infected respiratory secretions (droplets from the nose and throat). In most children, fifth disease is very mild. Children may develop red ("slapped") cheeks and a lacy rash which begins on the trunk and moves outward to the arms, buttocks, and thighs, which may come and go for several weeks. Many children have no symptoms.

Children are most contagious with Parvovirus B19 *before* they develop the distinctive rash of fifth disease. At that time, they may have fever, muscle aches, and headache. Once the rash develops, however, they are no longer contagious, and may return to school as long as they feel well.

Some groups of people are at risk for more severe disease following infection with Parvovirus B19. These include:

- 1.) People with sickle cell disease - may have severe anemia (low red blood cell count) requiring medical treatment.
- 2.) People with weakened immune systems, including HIV infection - may have severe, chronic anemia requiring medical treatment.
- 3.) Pregnant women - the virus may have harmful effects on the unborn baby

If you or your child have any of the conditions listed above, you should contact your health care provider to discuss the risks of exposure.

If you have any questions, please contact the school nurse at (718) 258-4441 ext. 20



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Fifth Disease

What is fifth disease? Fifth disease is a mild rash illness caused by human parvovirus B19.

Who gets fifth disease? Anyone can be infected. Outbreaks that occur often involve elementary and intermediate school children.

How is the virus spread? The virus is most often spread by exposure to airborne droplets from the nose and throat of infected people.

What are the symptoms of fifth disease and when do they appear?

Initial symptoms of low grade fever, tiredness, headache and muscle aches develop 4 to 21 days after infection. About 7 to 10 days later, a red rash may appear on the cheeks giving a "slapped cheek" appearance. The rash may extend to the body and may fade and reappear over weeks or months. Sometimes, the rash is lacy in appearance and may be itchy. Joint aches or swelling occurs infrequently among children. Many infected children have only vague signs of illness or no symptoms at all.

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

People with fifth disease are most contagious during the week before the rash appears. The typical rash appears as a result of a person's immune response and marks the end of the contagious period. However, many people are unaware of their infection and develop an immune response without any symptoms or rash.

How is fifth disease diagnosed?

In most cases, the diagnosis is based on the typical appearance of the rash.

What is the treatment for fifth disease?

At this time, there is no specific treatment.

What complications are associated with fifth disease?

While there is no evidence that human parvovirus B19 infection is a significant cause of birth defects, infection during pregnancy may result in miscarriage or spontaneous abortion, especially if infection occurs early in the pregnancy. In people with chronic red blood cell disorders, such as sickle-cell disease, or immunocompromising conditions such as HIV infection, parvovirus B19 may cause severe anemia.

How can fifth disease be prevented?

Measures to effectively control fifth disease have not been developed yet. During outbreaks in schools, pregnant school employees and people with chronic red blood cell disorders should consult their physicians and the health department for advice.

What should I do if I am exposed to a child with fifth disease during my pregnancy?

If you are exposed to a case or develop symptoms of fifth disease while pregnant, you should consult your doctor. Blood testing is available at some private laboratories and at the New York State Health Department laboratory to determine if you are already immune or infected with parvovirus B19.

Can a child with fifth disease remain in school?

Yes. A child who has symptoms of fifth disease is no longer contagious, and should not be excluded from school.