

Identifying Fifth Disease

Fifth disease is one of the six most common viral rashes in children.

1 Introduction

Fifth disease, also known as erythema infectiosum, is a common, contagious infection where a bright red rash appears on a child caused by the parvovirus B19. The disease is typically a mild illness, and oftentimes, people who are infected never realize they have it. While more common in children, infection in adults can still occur.

2 Symptoms

In some cases, fifth disease doesn't cause any symptoms. Nonetheless, some symptoms that may appear include:

- Mild cold symptoms — runny nose, slight fever and body aches
- Bright red rash on the cheeks (known as the “slapped cheek” rash)
- The facial rash can be followed by a lacy, flat rash that appears on the arms and legs
- Joint pain and swelling
- Headaches and fatigue

3 Diagnosis

A medical professional can diagnose fifth disease by seeing the “slapped cheek” rash without the other signs or symptoms of the illness. The disease is rarely diagnosed before the rash appears. In rare cases, a blood test may be done to look for specific antibodies against parvovirus B19.

4 Treatments

Fifth disease is a mild illness that normally goes away on its own within a few weeks with minimal or no treatment. Healthcare providers typically recommend over-the-counter (OTC) pain relievers to treat flu-like symptoms such as fever, headaches and joint pains. While the disease may resolve itself within three weeks, the rash may last longer.

Fifth disease often spreads in droplets of cough and sneezes, so avoiding exposure to the illness may be difficult. It is essential to wash your hands before you eat and after you have touched contaminated items.

Did you know?

When an outbreak of fifth disease occurs among school children, approximately 10-60% of susceptible children may develop symptoms.

For more information on Fifth's disease and supportive resources, please visit [mayoclinic.org](https://www.mayoclinic.org)

References:

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/a-to-z/fifth-disease-erythema-infectiosum-a-to-z>

<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/15774-fifth-disease>

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/parvovirus-infection/symptoms-causes/home/ovc-20376080>