

IDRS Infectious Disease Reporting System

Disease Reporting 24 Hours a Day

Columbus Public Health and Franklin County Public Health

FIFTH DISEASE

Fifth Disease (Erythema Infectiosum) is a mild rash illness that occurs most commonly in children. It is so called because at the turn of the century it was considered the fifth disease of childhood (after rubella, measles, scarlet fever and another rash illness.) Fifth Disease is caused by human parvovirus B19.

Symptoms

Symptoms may appear 4 to 20 days after contact with an infected person and include:

- A red rash on the cheeks giving a “slapped face” appearance. The rash may look “lacy” as it spreads to the trunk, arms, and legs. It may recur if the person gets warm or upset for up to a month.
- Low-grade fever and general fatigue
- Adults may have joint pain and swelling
- 25% or more of infections have no noticeable symptoms

Transmission

- The virus is spread by exposure to airborne droplets from the nose and throat of infected people.
- People with fifth disease can give the virus to others one week before appearance of the rash. By the time the rash appears, the individual is no longer contagious and may attend school or child care.
- About half of people will be exposed to fifth disease at some point and develop lifelong immunity to it. Because it often does not cause any symptoms, many people could have had it and never known.
- Pet dogs or cats can be immunized against “parvovirus” but these are animal parvoviruses that do not infect humans. A person cannot “catch” parvovirus from a pet, and pets cannot catch it from humans.

Treatment

- Fifth Disease is usually a mild illness that resolves on its own. There is no specific treatment for it.
- Treatment of symptoms such as fever, pain or itching is usually all that is needed for Fifth Disease. Adults may use medicines such as aspirin or ibuprofen to relieve symptoms. Children should not take aspirin.
- A health care provider can often diagnose Fifth Disease by seeing the rash. In cases in which it is important to confirm the diagnosis, a blood test is available to detect antibodies to parvovirus.
- Parvovirus can cause anemia (low blood cell count) in people with sickle cell disease or similar types of chronic anemia. People with conditions that lower the immune system are also at risk for serious illness. Occasionally, serious complications may develop from getting fifth disease during pregnancy. People in these categories should see a health care provider if they are exposed to someone with fifth disease.

Prevention

- There is no vaccine or medicine that prevents fifth disease.
- Frequent hand washing is recommended as a practical and probably effective method of preventing transmission.
- People with fifth disease do not need to stay home from normal activities, since they are probably not contagious by the time they have the rash.
- Pregnant women and people with conditions that lower the immune system should avoid exposure to infectious people.

All information is general in nature and is not intended to be used as a substitute for appropriate professional advice.



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