



Fifth Disease

Patient and Family Education

This teaching sheet contains general information only. Your child's doctor or a member of your child's health care team will talk with you about specific care for your child.

What is Fifth disease?

Fifth Disease, also known as slapped cheek disease, is an infection caused by a virus. It is so named because Fifth disease was the fifth pink-red rash in childhood to be described by doctors. It usually occurs in the winter and spring, but a child can become ill with the disease any time of the year.

What are the possible symptoms of Fifth Disease?

Your child may not feel ill, but he may have one or more of these symptoms:

- Low grade fever
- Tiredness, runny nose, sore throat
- Flushed cheeks (looks like the face has been slapped)
- Rash on the arms, legs and body that may last up to 3-6 weeks. Sometimes the rash can come and go for weeks. It can happen more if your child is in the sun or gets very warm.

How does it spread?

Fifth disease spreads through:

- Direct contact
- The air if an infected person coughs or sneezes

How long is it contagious?

- About one week before the rash appears.
- A child is no longer contagious when the rash appears.
- Once the rash appears and the fever has been gone for 24 hours, your child may return to school or day care.

What is the treatment?

Your child's doctor will talk with about specific care for your child. Some general guidelines to follow include:

- Fifth disease is a virus and goes away without any treatment
- Give acetaminophen (Tylenol or other less costly store brand) or ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil or other less costly store brand) if prescribed by your child's doctor to control fever. Follow the directions on the box carefully or ask your child's doctor how much medicine to give.
 - **DO NOT** give your child more than 5 doses of acetaminophen in a 24-hour period.
 - **DO NOT** give acetaminophen to babies younger than 3 months of age without a doctor's order.
 - **DO NOT** give ibuprofen to babies younger than 6 months of age without a doctor's order.
 - **DO NOT** use acetaminophen and ibuprofen together. **DO NOT** alternate.
- Most children with Fifth disease do not get very ill and will get better without problems.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.

Fifth Disease, continued

- **Children with weak immune systems, sickle cell anemia or other blood disorders should call the doctor right away if they have been exposed.**

When should I call the doctor?

Call your child's doctor if he:

- Has ***persistent*** lethargy or irritability (does not smile or show interest in play for at least a few minutes during a four-hour period) when the fever is down.
- Shows signs of dehydration (being dried out):
 - No urine in 6 to 8 hours in a baby younger than 1 year old
 - No urine in more than 8 hours in a child older than 1 year old
 - No tears when crying
 - Sunken eyes
 - Dry lips and mouth
- If your child has any remaining weakness, pallor, joint pain or other problems after the rash goes away.

What else do I need to be concerned about?

The virus does not cause birth defects, but in rare cases, it can cause severe anemia or death of an unborn baby. Pregnant women should tell their doctor at their next office visit if they are exposed in their first three months. Adults can also get Fifth disease. Most adults get just a mild pink rash of the cheeks. Some may have joint pains that last from one to three months.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.