Fifth Disease

What is fifth disease?
Fifth disease is a viral infection caused by human parvovirus B19. It is a common childhood disease. Once you have had the disease, you are usually immune from getting again.

Who gets fifth disease?
Fifth disease most commonly occurs in elementary age children, although anyone can contract the virus.

How is fifth disease spread?
Fifth disease is spread through coughing and sneezing. A person is contagious for about a week before the rash begins.

What are the symptoms of fifth disease?
About 1 to 2 weeks after exposure, symptoms will begin to appear, starting with a low grade fever and tiredness. This is followed by a facial rash, referred to as “slapped cheeks”, which progresses into a lace-like rash on the trunk, legs, and arms.

Approximately 20% of people do not have symptoms. Adults may develop joint pain and swelling which usually lasts a few days.

What is the treatment for fifth disease?
There is no specific treatment for fifth disease. Fever should be treated with non-aspirin products. Patients should also get plenty of rest and fluids.

Are there complications from fifth disease?
Complications usually occur in people who have an impaired immune system or have some kinds of anemia. Everyone who suffers from these conditions should consult a physician if they are exposed to the virus.

Some studies have shown that a few women infected while pregnant have a higher risk of miscarriage early in pregnancy. Also, the virus may infect the fetus and cause complications. Pregnant women who are exposed should consult their doctor as soon as possible.

How can fifth disease be prevented?
There is no vaccine to prevent infection with this virus. In order to limit the spread of the virus, use a tissue to catch sneezes and coughs and wash hands frequently throughout the day.
How do I get more information on fifth disease?
Van Buren/Cass District Health Department
Phone: (269) 621-3143

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

This fact sheet is meant to provide general health information and is not intended to be medical advice or otherwise take the place of your doctor’s orders or to diagnose your specific health problems. Check with your doctor if you have any questions or concerns about your health.