

FACTS ABOUT FIFTH DISEASE (ERYTHEMA INFECTIOSUM)

Fifth disease is an infection of the respiratory system. It is caused by a virus called parvovirus B19. This virus spreads the same way as a cold virus does:

- ❖ On the hands of someone who has the infection
- ❖ On something that has been touched by someone who has the infection
- ❖ In the air, after an affected person has breathed or sneezed

The infection starts as a very red rash on the cheeks, making the face look like it has been slapped. One to 4 days later, a red, lace-like rash appears, first on the arms, and then on the rest of the body. The rash may last from 1 to 3 weeks and may be accompanied by fever.

The illness is often very mild. Sometimes, the child may not even feel sick. Adults usually get a more severe case, with fever and painful joints. At least 50 percent of adults have the Fifth Disease in childhood and will not get it again if exposed to a child with the infection.

The infection may be more serious for:

- ❖ Children with sickle cell anemia or certain other chronic forms of anemia. Fifth Disease can make the anemia more severe.
- ❖ Pregnant women, because there is a very small risk that their unborn children may develop anemia before birth.

Outbreaks of Fifth Disease can occur in school-age children. There is no vaccine to prevent the infection and no medication to treat it.

THINGS PARENTS CAN DO:

- Watch your child for signs of Fifth Disease if another child has it.
- Contact your physician if your child becomes ill with fifth disease and you are pregnant.
- Your child may continue attending school if feeling well enough to take part in the activities. (By the time the rash develops, the child is no longer infectious).
- Please contact the school if your child becomes ill with Fifth Disease.