

Fifth Disease

Fifth Disease is a viral illness generally seen in the winter and spring months. It is common between the ages of 5 and 15 and most children recover from it quickly and without complications. Because it is a viral illness it cannot be treated with antibiotics.

Fifth Disease usually begins with a low-grade fever, headache, and mild cold-like symptoms (stuffy or runny nose). These symptoms pass, and the illness seems to be gone until a rash appears a few days later. The bright red rash typically begins on the face causing a distinctive slapped cheek appearance. Several days later the rash spreads and red blotches (usually lighter in color) extend down to the trunk of the body, arms, and legs. The rash usually spares the palms of the hands and soles of the feet. The rash can take on a lacy, net-like appearance. Older children sometimes complain that the rash itches. Most children with a rash caused by Fifth Disease do not look sick and no longer have a fever. Once the rash appears, children are no longer considered contagious and may attend school. It may take 1 to 3 weeks for the rash to completely clear and during that time the rash may actually appear to worsen until it fades away entirely. Other symptoms that occasionally occur are sore throat, swollen glands, red eyes and diarrhea. In some cases there may also be some joint swelling or pain, often in the hands, wrists, knees, or ankles.

Fifth Disease is spread person to person in fluids from the nose, mouth, and throat of someone with the infection, especially through droplets from coughs and sneezes. Practicing good hygiene, especially frequent hand washing is always good.

If your child develops any symptoms of Fifth Disease, contact their physician for an evaluation. Please notify your child's Health Office if your child has a confirmed diagnosis of Fifth Disease. Fifth Disease can be especially harmful to pregnant women.