



# Fifth Disease

(Parvovirus B19, Erythema Infectiosum, “Slapped Cheeks Syndrome”)

## What is Fifth Disease?

Fifth disease is a mild infection caused by erythrovirus, previously called parvovirus B19. It is also known as erythema infectiosum or slapped cheeks syndrome. It is common in children between the ages of five and 14 years old, but may also occur in adults. Most outbreaks of fifth disease occur in school-age children, rather than pre-schoolers. Many children infected with this virus do not become ill. It is common in late winter, spring and early summer months. The rates of infection may also increase every three to four years.

## Symptoms of Fifth Disease

Initially, the symptoms may be mild which often goes unrecognized. The person may have a fever, runny nose, sore throat, headache and mild gastrointestinal pain, including nausea and diarrhea. In two to five days, the rash appears with the following characteristics:

- Distinctive rash that has a “slapped cheek” appearance. This is more common in children than adults. Occasionally the rash will extend over the bridge of the nose or around the mouth.
- Red, lace-like rash on the arms and legs may appear one to four days later.
- Rash may come and go over the next one to three weeks and may itch.
- Rash may be exaggerated by exposure to sunlight, heat or emotional stress.

In children, the infection is usually mild and of short duration. Teenagers and adults may have self-limited arthritis. Older children and adults may have difficulty walking and in bending their joints such as wrists, knees, ankles, fingers and shoulders.

It is important that this infection be diagnosed by a doctor because the symptoms closely resemble rubella and scarlet fever. The illness may be more severe in a child with chronic anemia. The majority of adults who had fifth disease in childhood will not get it again if exposed to an infected person.

## How Fifth Disease spreads

Fifth disease spreads from person-to-person through contact with the respiratory secretions of an infected person. Also, it can be spread by contact with infected blood because it can withstand the usual thermal treatment aimed at infectious agents in blood products.

Infected persons are infectious for several days before the onset of the rash. Persons with the rash are not as contagious and are no longer likely to spread the infection once the rash appears. The time between the initial infection and the onset of symptoms varies from four to 20 days.

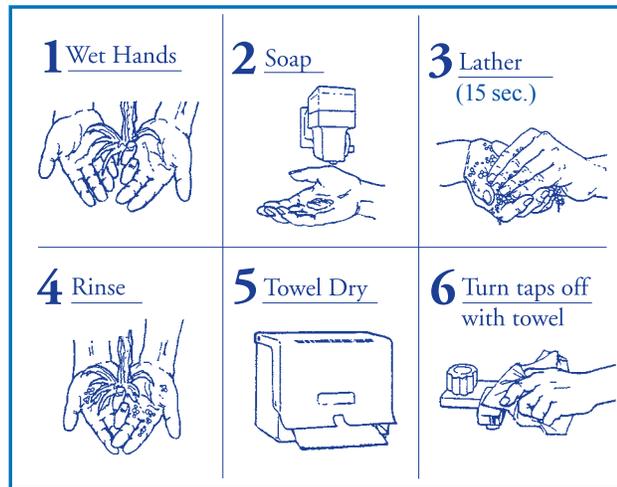
**For further information, please call:**  
**York Region Health Connection 1-800-361-5653**  
**TTY 1-866-252-9933 or visit [www.york.ca](http://www.york.ca)**

## Preventing Fifth Disease

The most effective method of preventing fifth disease is frequent hand washing and to avoid sharing items with an infected person such as cups, glasses and utensils.

## Treating Fifth Disease

There is no treatment for fifth disease and there isn't a vaccine to prevent it. Frequent hand washing may help to reduce the spread of the virus. The child may continue with usual activities provided they feel well. People with weakened immunity and pregnant women who have been in contact with fifth disease should see their doctor.



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