

**MONROE COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH  
DISEASE CONTROL UNIT 274-6079**

**Fifth Disease  
(erythema infectiosum, parvovirus B19 infections)**

**What is fifth disease?**

It is a viral infection caused by a human parvovirus (B19).

**Who gets fifth disease?**

Anyone can be infected, but the disease is more common in children in the winter and spring months.

**How is virus spread?**

The virus is spread primarily through contact with respiratory secretions of an infected person. It can also be spread from mother to unborn baby and through transfusions and blood products.

**What are the symptoms and when do they appear?**

Four to 20 days after exposure the person may break out in a rash on the face that has a slapped face appearance. A lace like rash can appear on the trunk and extremities that fades but may recur for 1-3 weeks or longer on exposure to sunlight or heat. Mild symptoms such as fatigue and low grade fever may proceed the rash.

**When and for how long is a person able to spread the disease?**

People with fifth disease appear to be contagious during the week prior to the appearance of the rash. By the time the rash is evident, the person is probably beyond the contagious period.

**How is fifth disease diagnosed?**

In most cases, the disease is diagnosed based on the appearance of typical symptoms. A specific blood test to confirm the diagnosis is available but is not necessary in healthy children.

**Does past infection with the virus make a person immune?**

It is thought that people who have been previously infected acquire long-term immunity. Studies have shown that more than 50 percent of adults are immune to parvovirus B19.

**What is the treatment?**

At this time there is no specific treatment.

**MONROE COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH  
DISEASE CONTROL UNIT 274-6079**

**What are the complications associated with fifth disease?**

During the first trimester of pregnancy the infection may increase risk of miscarriage or spontaneous abortion. In people with chronic red blood cell disorders, such as sickle-cell disease, infection may result in severe anemia. Infection has also been associated with arthritis in adults.

**What can be done to prevent the spread of fifth disease?**

Measures to effectively control fifth disease have not been developed yet. During outbreaks in schools, pregnant school employees and people with chronic red blood cell disorders should consult their physician and the local or state health department for advice.

**What should I do if I am exposed to a child with fifth disease during my pregnancy?**

If you are exposed to a case or develop symptoms of fifth disease while pregnant, you should consult your doctor. Blood testing is available to determine if you are already immune or infected with parvovirus B19. You should consult with your physician regarding the need for testing.

**Where can I call for additional information regarding fifth disease and pregnancy?**

In addition to your doctor, information can be obtained from your local health department or the New York State Department of Health hotline: Growing up Healthy at (800) 522-5006.