

What you need to know about Fifth disease (parvovirus B19) and pregnancy



What is Fifth disease?

Fifth disease is an infection of the airway and lungs caused by human parvovirus B19. The infection causes a mild rash and occurs most commonly in children.

Fifth disease begins with a mild illness that may produce a fever, tiredness, muscle aches and a headache.

The infection does not cause serious illness in most people and the rash resolves in 7 to 10 days.

Risks during pregnancy

Women who have had Fifth disease in the past will have immunity that protects them from getting Fifth disease again. These women do not need to be concerned about this infection during pregnancy. About 50 percent of pregnant women are immune to Fifth disease.

There is some risk to the developing baby if a pregnant woman who is not immune to Fifth disease is exposed during pregnancy. In very rare cases, the virus can affect the unborn baby's ability to produce red blood cells, sometimes leading to a dangerous form of anemia.

The risk is lower for exposures in the second half of pregnancy than in the first half.

A blood test can be done to see if you are immune to the virus that causes Fifth disease.

If you are pregnant and think you may have been exposed to Fifth Disease, consult your doctor.

Signs and symptoms

Symptoms generally appear between 4 and 14 days after coming into contact with the virus. They include:

- Symptoms of mild illness, such as a low-grade fever or mild cold-like symptoms.
- Children with Fifth disease typically have a "slapped-cheek" appearance on the face and a lacy red rash on the body, arms and legs.
- In adults, a rash is not usually seen. Adults may develop joint pain, which usually resolves but can last for days to months to years.
- 25% of adults or more may have no symptoms.

Fifth disease (parvovirus B19) and pregnancy

How it is spread

Fifth disease is contagious before the rash appears. Once the rash appears, your child can no longer pass it on to anyone else.

Fifth disease is spread through secretions of the mouth and nose (i.e., sneezing and coughing, touching used facial tissues).

Transmission during pregnancy from mother to fetus is possible, but does not always occur.

Protecting yourself before pregnancy

At least 50% of people have developed immunity by the time they enter adulthood. People who are concerned about Fifth disease can have a blood test to determine their immunity.

Good hand washing is an important part of stopping the spread of this disease.

There is no vaccine available for Fifth disease.

Protecting yourself during pregnancy

- Cover your nose and mouth while sneezing and coughing, and carefully dispose of used facial tissues.
- Do not share eating utensils.
- Outbreaks in child care and schools usually mean there is a wider spread of the disease in the community. Removing your child from child care settings is not necessary, as it only slightly decreases the risk of exposure.

If you are exposed

Contact your doctor. You may want to consider blood testing to determine your immunity.

Even if you become infected, it is unlikely the disease will be passed on to your baby.

How it is treated

Fifth Disease is caused by a virus. There is no treatment.

Where to find more information

Call *Health Matters* at Oxford County Public Health: 519 539-9800 or toll-free 1 800 755-0394. Ask for Infectious Diseases, ext. 3500

Visit the Sick Kids Mother Risk website at www.motherisk.org

Visit the Canadian Paediatric Society website at www.cps.ca



PUBLIC HEALTH & EMERGENCY SERVICES

410 Buller Street, Woodstock, ON N4S 4N2
Tel: 519 539-9800 | Toll-free: 1 800 755-0394
www.oxfordcounty.ca/publichealth