



Fifth Disease or “Slapped Cheek” in the Child Care Setting

What is it?

Fifth Disease is a mild rash, also called “Slapped Cheek.” Caused by a virus (parvovirus B19), outbreaks most often occur in winter and spring, but a person may become ill with Fifth Disease at any time of the year.

How is it spread?

Children and adults can get the illness. The Fifth Disease virus lives in the nose and throat. It can be spread from person to person through coughing, sneezing, kissing on the lips, and sharing food, eating utensils and mouthed toys. Women who develop Fifth Disease during pregnancy may pass the infection to their unborn babies.

When is it contagious?

It is contagious one to two weeks before the rash appears. Once the rash appears, a person is no longer contagious. A child who has been diagnosed with Fifth Disease need not be excluded from child care.

What about Fifth Disease and pregnancy?

If a pregnant woman becomes infected with Fifth Disease for the first time, there is a small risk (less than 10 percent) that the fetus may suffer damage, including the possibility of miscarriage or stillbirth. The woman herself may have no symptoms or a mild illness with rash or joint pains. Pregnant women who have been exposed to Fifth Disease should consult their health care provider.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms begin with a mild fever and complaints of tiredness. After a few days, the cheeks take on a flushed appearance that looks like the face has been slapped. There may also be a soft, light rash on the chest, arms and legs, but not all infected persons develop a rash. As the rash appears, the child usually begins to feel better, and the fever resolves. The rash may last for over a week and may recur in response to sunlight or a warm bath. Most persons who get Fifth Disease are not very ill and recover without any serious consequences. However, children with sickle cell anemia, chronic anemia or an impaired immune system may become seriously ill when infected with parvovirus B19 and may require medical care.

How can we limit the spread?

- Make sure that all children and staff use good hand-washing practices especially after wiping or blowing noses; after contact with any nose, throat or eye secretions; and before preparing or eating food.
- Do not share food, pacifiers, bottles, toothbrushes, eating utensils or drinking cups.
- Clean and disinfect all mouthed toys and frequently used surfaces on a daily basis.
- Don't kiss children on the mouth.
- Play outdoors as much as possible.
- Avoid exposing pregnant women and people with blood disorders and immune problems.
- Make sure that the child care facility is well ventilated, either by opening the windows or doors or using a ventilation system.
- Make sure that children are not crowded together, especially during naps on floor mats or cots.
- Teach children to cough and sneeze into their elbow and away from people.

What if an outbreak of Fifth Disease occurs?

- Notify all parents and staff members. Pregnant women and parents of children who have a damaged immune system, sickle cell anemia, or other blood disorders may want to consult their health care providers.
- Make sure that all children and adults use good handwashing techniques (see our *Good Hygiene Fact Sheet*). If you are pregnant, consult your health care provider.

References

- The ABCs of Safe and Healthy Child Care*, A Handbook for Child Care Providers, Centers for Diseases Control and Prevention (CDC), 1997.
- Healthy Young Children*, a Manual for Programs, NAEYC, 1995 Edition.
- Keeping Kids Healthy*, Preventing and Managing Communicable Disease in Child Care, California Department of Education, 1994.
- Stepping Stones to Using Caring for Our Children*, National Health and Safety Performance Standards, Guidelines for Out-Of-Home Child Care Programs, Maternal & Child Health bureau, 1997.

By Rahman A. Zamani, MPH (3/12/1998)