

# FIFTH DISEASE FACTSHEET

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
Division of Epidemiology-Disease Surveillance and Investigation  
899 N. Capitol Street, NE, Suite 580  
Washington, DC 20002  
(202) 442-9371 • Fax (202) 442-8060  
[www.doh.dc.gov](http://www.doh.dc.gov)

## What is Fifth Disease?

Fifth disease is caused by infection with human parvovirus B19. This virus infects only humans.

## Who gets Fifth Disease?

Fifth disease occurs most commonly in children. An adult who is not immune can be infected. About 50% of adults, however, have been previously infected and developed immunity to the virus.

## How do I get Fifth Disease?

Fifth's disease has been found in the respiratory secretions (e.g., saliva, sputum, or nasal mucus) of infected persons before the onset of rash, when they appear to "just have a cold." The virus is probably spread from person to person by direct contact with those secretions, such as sharing drinking cups or utensils.

## What are the symptoms of Fifth Disease?

The ill child typically has a "slapped-cheek" rash on the face and a lacy red rash on the trunk and limbs. Occasionally, the rash may itch. An ill child may have a low-grade fever, malaise, or a "cold" a few days before the rash breaks out. The child is usually not very ill, and the rash resolves in 7 to 10 days. Infection may cause severe, acute anemia in persons with sickle-cell disease or similar types of chronic anemia (rash does not appear in these individuals).

## For how long can someone be ill?

A susceptible person usually becomes ill 4 to 14 days after being infected with the virus, but may become ill for as long as 20 days after infection.

## How is it diagnosed?

A physician can often diagnose fifth disease by seeing the typical rash during a physical examination. In cases in which it is important to

confirm the diagnosis, a blood test may be done to look for antibodies to parvovirus.

## How is Fifth Disease treated?

Treatment of symptoms such as fever, pain, or itching is usually all that is needed for fifth disease. The few people who have severe anemia may need to be hospitalized and receive blood transfusions. Persons with immune problems may need special medical care, including treatment with immune globulin (antibodies), to help their bodies get rid of the infection.

## What should I do if I have Fifth disease?

See your healthcare provider and wash your hands frequently.

## Should an infected person be excluded from school or work?

Excluding persons with fifth disease from work, child care centers, or schools is not likely to prevent the spread of the virus, since people are contagious before they develop the rash.

## What precautions should the infected person follow?

There is no vaccine or medicine that prevents parvovirus B19 infection. Frequent handwashing is recommended as a practical and probably effective method to decrease the chance of becoming infected.

## Want more information?

Information about Fifth's Disease and other related health topics can be found at the website [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov). The DC Department of Health promotes the health and safety of the District residents. For additional information, please call (202) 442-9371.

