

Information on Fifth Disease (Erythema Infection) from your Health Office

Erythema infectiosum is called fifth disease because it was identified after four other rashes: rubeola, rubella, scarlet fever and roseola. It is a very mild skin disorder caused by a virus. About 1 week after exposure, the child develops a low-grade fever that lasts 5 to 7 days and then recovers with no additional symptoms in about another week. A distinctive rash may then appear. This faint, lacy rash on the trunk, arms, and legs resembles a slapped cheek. Adults, especially women, may have joint pain and swelling at this stage. Occasionally, the rash recurs after days or weeks, but promptly subsides. Often there is neither fever nor rash with this disease. The child may return to school when he or she feels well and when the fever (if present) subsides.

Although Fifth Disease usually produces mild self-limited illness, three groups of persons are at risk for serious complications.

1. Pregnant women
2. Persons with chronic hemolytic anemia
3. Immunodeficient people

Fifth Disease occurring during pregnancy is associated with increased risk of fetal death. There is no vaccine to prevent Fifth Disease. Pregnant women should avoid contact with known cases of Fifth Disease. To access susceptibility of exposed pregnant women, antibody test may be carried out.

Contact your physician for further information and any questions. Also feel free to contact our office at 435-4145.