
SUBJECT: Fifth Disease
Date issued: January 15, 2018 **Pages:** 2
To: Parents and Staff
From: Control of Infectious Diseases Team, Public Health

There has been a case of Fifth Disease identified at Credit Meadows Elementary School.

What is fifth disease?

Fifth disease is a common illness in children, caused by a virus (Parvovirus B19). It is usually mild in children; however infection can be serious for children with sickle-cell anemia, persons with a weakened immune system, and susceptible pregnant women. In susceptible pregnant women, there is a very small risk (less than 3%) that their unborn child may develop anemia before birth. There is no vaccine or treatment for fifth disease. Antibiotics do not work, because it is a viral infection.

What are the signs and symptoms of fifth disease?

- Fifth disease begins with a slight fever, but most children do not feel sick.
- A bright red rash appears on the cheeks, followed 1-4 days later by a lace-like rash on the arms, body and legs.
- The rash may last 1-3 weeks and may worsen if exposed to heat and sunlight.
- At least 50% of adults have had fifth disease in childhood and will not get it again if exposed to a child with the infection.
- Those adults who do catch fifth disease may not get a rash, but may have mild joint pain for about two weeks. Pain relievers may help with these symptoms. Speak to your pharmacist or physician.

How is fifth disease spread?

Fifth disease is spread by breathing in droplets that are sprayed into the air when an infected person sneezes, coughs or talks. It can be spread by direct contact with discharge from an infected person's mouth, nose and throat, or through contact with objects used by an infected person.

How long is someone contagious?

A person infected with fifth disease is contagious during the early part of the illness, before the rash appears. By the time a child has the characteristic "slapped cheek" rash of fifth disease, for example, he or she is probably no longer contagious.

What can parents do?

- Watch your child for signs and symptoms of fifth disease. If your child develops symptoms, contact your family physician or nurse practitioner.
- If anyone in our household is pregnant, or has a weakened immune system and has been in contact with a case of fifth disease, contact your family doctor to discuss your risk.

What are some ways to prevent other types of illness?

- Good hand washing is the best way to stop the spread of disease. Clean your hands often with soap and water or an alcohol handrub. This is most important before you prepare and eat food, and after you cough, sneeze, wipe a nose, or use the washroom. Be aware that the virus can live for a long time in feces.
- Cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze.
- Do not share food, drinks, toothbrushes, musical instruments with mouthpieces, or eating utensils. Sports teams should not share water bottles or mouthguards
- If you have symptoms of illness avoid direct saliva contact with others (e.g., kissing).

When can my child return to school?

Children with fifth disease may attend school or daycare if feeling well enough to take part in activities. By the time the rash develops, the child is no longer infectious.

For more information, refer to contact or website:

Call: Control of Infectious Diseases Reporting Line

Contact: 519-822-2715 or 1-800-265-7293 ext. 4752 / www.wdgpulichealth.ca