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FIFTH'S DISEASE

Fifth disease is a mild illness usually without a fever caused by parvovirus B19. Severe complications are rare but people with chronic blood disorders may develop an inability to form new blood cells and develop anemia. During pregnancy the virus can infect the unborn child, which can result in death of the fetus.

- It is spread by exposure to secretions or droplets from the nose and throat. It occurs more commonly in children of elementary school age.
- The symptoms start with a low grade fever and fatigue. A red rash which looks like a slap mark commonly appears on the cheeks and a fine lace-like rash may appear on the body. The rash may be itchy. Some people have mild signs of illness or no symptoms at all. The above symptoms are more common in children. Adults more commonly have arthritic pain and less rash or fever.
- Symptoms start 1-2 weeks after exposure.
- A person is most contagious about one week before the onset of the rash, and once the rash starts, it probably cannot be spread to others.
- There is no specific treatment.
- If you have had fifth disease it is thought that people develop long-term immunity. Studies show that about 50% of adults have immunity to fifth disease.
- You do not have to be excluded from work or school because the contagious stage happens before most of the symptoms. Pregnant women should avoid exposure to persons infected. Pregnant women with sick children at home should be advised to wash hands frequently and avoid sharing eating utensils.
- The virus doesn't cause birth defects but 10% of babies who are infected with fifth disease before birth develop severe anemia and 1-2% may even die. A pregnant person should come for an antibody test drawn as soon as they are exposed to a child with fifth disease; this will tell if you have already had the disease and are protected from becoming infected again. If the person is not immune, during first trimester there is a slight 1-2% increase in risk of miscarriage. If the person is in the 1st trimester the virus could break down some of the baby's red blood cells causing anemia but is unlikely to be severe enough to harm the baby. Monthly ultrasounds are used to follow the baby for signs of hydrops (sign of severe anemia)
- EVEN IF THE PATIENT IS NOT IMMUNE, THEY MAY NOT HAVE BEEN INFECTED WITH THE VIRUS DESPITE CLOSE EXPOSURE TO A CHILD WITH FIFTH DISEASE.
- A second blood test in a few weeks will show if they have been recently infected with the virus, which then would require the monthly ultrasounds mentioned above. If the patient does get fifth they still only have a very slight risk of the baby being harmed.