

# Fifth Disease



Feb. 2015

Communicable Disease Division  
3629 South D Street, Tacoma, WA 98418  
(253) 798-6410 (phone) • (253) 798-7666 (fax)

## Date:

Dear Parent or Guardian:

Your child may have recently been exposed to **fifth disease**. Fifth disease is a common childhood rash caused by a virus called parvovirus B19. It is also known as “slapped cheeks’ disease” because it often starts as a dramatic rash on the cheeks.

### What are the symptoms of fifth disease?

Symptoms may begin with fever, muscles aches, and headache. One to 3 weeks later a bright red rash appears on the cheeks. A lace-like appearing rash then appears on the trunk, arms, buttocks, and thighs. The rash may disappear and reappear after exposure to heat for weeks; once the rash appears, the child no longer feels ill. People may be infected and infectious without ever having any signs or symptoms.

### How is fifth disease spread?

Fifth disease is spread from person-to-person during the early part of the illness by direct contact with the respiratory secretions, such as drainage from the nose and throat, from an infected person. Objects such as used tissues, mouthed toys, drinking cups, and utensils may spread the virus. Once the rash appears, the person is no longer contagious.

### How is fifth disease diagnosed and treated?

A healthcare provider can usually make a diagnosis of fifth disease based on the symptoms. Fifth disease is usually a mild illness that does not require medical care. General comfort measures may help with early symptoms. Pregnant women or people with certain blood disorders or immune deficiencies may require medical attention.

### How do you control the spread?

Washing hands frequently and thoroughly, especially after touching nose or throat secretions. Avoid sharing personal items that may be contaminated with saliva, such as drinking cups and eating utensils. Use a sanitizing solution on shared toys and other potentially contaminated items. Cover mouth with tissue or arm when coughing or sneezing. Properly dispose of tissues containing nose and throat secretions. Excluding a child diagnosed with fifth disease from school or childcare is not necessary because they are no longer contagious once the rash appears.

### How do I get more information?

For more information about fifth disease, contact your healthcare provider or Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department at (253) 798-6410 and press “0”.