

# Parvovirus



December 2001

## CAUSE:

Parvovirus B19 infection is also known as Fifth Disease, erythema infectiosum and slapped cheek syndrome. It is a viral infection which often affects red blood cells. It is caused by a human parvovirus (B19) and is not found in animals. For many years the infection was viewed as an unimportant rash illness in children. Recently, studies have shown that the virus may be responsible for serious complications in certain individuals.

## SYMPTOMS:

### How will it affect you?

One to two weeks after exposure to the disease, some children will experience a low grade fever and tiredness. By the third week, a red rash generally appears on the cheeks giving a slapped face appearance. A lace-like rash may develop on the trunk and extremities. This rash tends to fade then reappear again for one to three weeks or longer on exposure to sunlight or heat. The rash may also be itchy. Some children may have vague signs of illness or no symptoms at all.

### Is it serious?

While there is no evidence that parvovirus B19 infection is a significant cause of foetal defects, some studies have shown that infection may increase the risk of miscarriage or spontaneous abortion in pregnant women.

In people with chronic red blood cell disorders, infection may result in severe anaemia. Infection has also been associated with arthritis in adults.

### How long will it last?

The symptoms of parvovirus B19 infection tend to last for one to three weeks.

## OCCURRENCE:

### How common is it?

Studies have shown that more than 50 percent of adults have been infected with parvovirus B19 at some time and are therefore immune.

### How likely are you to be affected?

Anyone can be infected, but the disease seems to occur more often in young school-age children. It is thought that people who have been previously infected acquire long-term or lifelong immunity.

## NATURAL HISTORY:

### How is it spread?

The virus is spread by exposure to airborne droplets from the nose and throat of infected people.

### How long does it take to get sick from when you catch the infection?

The time from exposure to developing symptoms is variable, ranging from four to twenty days.

### How long is it infectious?

People with parvovirus B19 infection appear to be contagious during the week prior to the appearance of the rash. By the time the rash is evident, the person is probably beyond the contagious period.

## TREATMENT:

### What treatment is available?

In most people no specific treatment is required due to the benign nature of the disease.

**PREVENTION:**

**What can be done to prevent the disease?**

There is no vaccine available to prevent this disease.

As children who have the disease are infectious before any signs or symptoms develop, it is not possible to prevent transmission by identifying and excluding them from school or day care.

**How can the spread of disease be controlled?**

Practice good handwashing and avoid sharing utensils or food. This particularly applies to pregnant women with sick children and children in child care centres and schools. During outbreaks in schools and child daycare centres, pregnant employees and people with anaemia (chronic red blood cell disorders) or immunodeficiency should consult their local doctor and the state health department for advice.

If you are exposed to a case or develop symptoms of parvovirus B19 infection while pregnant, you should consult your doctor. Blood testing is available to determine if you are already immune or infected with parvovirus B19.

If your child develops Parvovirus B19, report the illness to the director of the child care centre or school.

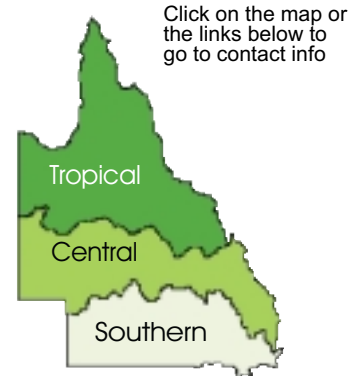
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**For more information, contact your local public health network**



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For medical advice, contact your doctor, hospital or health clinic.