

**MSAD # 13 / RSU #83
Health Alert**

**Fifth Disease - Erythema Infectiosum
Important Notice to Parents**

Fifth disease, also known as erythema infectiosum, is a common mild rash illness caused by human parvovirus B19. Infection is most common in school-aged children. The virus causing fifth disease is quite prevalent in the general community. Approximately 50 percent of young adults demonstrate immunity to Fifth disease resulting from infection in childhood. It usually occurs in students in late winter and early spring, often as clusters or outbreaks. The illness is characterized first by headache, body ache, no or low-grade fever, and chills.

These symptoms are usually mild and resolve after a few days. Then, following a week of no symptoms, a bright red rash appears on the cheeks giving a “slapped face” appearance, sometimes with a “lacy” rash on the chest, arms, and legs. The rash is benign but can fade and recur for a few days or a few weeks, especially in response to changes in environmental temperature (e.g., hot bath, exposure to sunlight). Adults may not develop the rash but sometimes experience pains in the joints, especially the hands and feet.

Approximately 25 percent of adults who contract the infection have no symptoms. Although the symptoms are usually mild and in many cases goes unnoticed, in people with certain red blood cell abnormalities, such as sickle cell disease, this infection can cause an aplastic crisis. Infection with the virus can also cause chronic anemia in immunosuppressed people or arthralgia or arthritis in susceptible adults. Parvovirus infection during early pregnancy may cause intrauterine growth retardation, fetal hydrops and/or death in the fetus, although this is very rare.

The incubation period is normally from 4 -14 days, but can be as long as 20 days from exposure to development of rash.

Fifth Disease is transmitted through contact with infectious respiratory secretions, exposure to blood or blood products and from an infected mother to her fetus; however, droplet contact and close person-to-person contact are the most common modes of transmission.

An infected person can spread fifth disease during the week prior to the appearance of the rash. When the rash appears, a person can no longer spread the virus to others. Since individuals with fifth disease are most communicable before onset of illness they are usually not excluded from school as long as they are feeling well. Students should not return to school until after the fever is gone (normally for 24 hours) and the child feels well enough to participate in normal activities. Once the rash appears they are usually no longer contagious so there is no reason they must remain out of school.

As always, frequent hand washing is a very effective way to reduce the spread of fifth disease. Additionally, promptly clean or dispose of articles, such as tissues, soiled with nose and throat discharges. Do not to share items that may be contaminated with saliva such as beverage containers or eating utensils. Cover mouth with tissue when coughing or sneezing. If no tissue is available, individuals should “catch their cold” in their elbow” by covering their mouth and nose with the crook of their arm and coughing or sneezing into their shirt or coat sleeve.

Pregnant women should consult with their health care provider if exposed to a case of fifth disease.

Please contact the school nurse, Mel Chadbourne, RN if you have any questions. More information is also available at the Maine CDC web site.