



MID-JERSEY PEDIATRICS

www.midjerseypeds.com

**33 Brunswick Woods Drive
East Brunswick, NJ 08816
(732) 257-4330**

**25 Kilmer Drive
Building #3, Suite 107
Morganville, NJ 07751
(732) 972-6888**

FIFTH DISEASE (ERYTHEMA INFECTIONOSUM)

Erythema infectiosum is a moderately contagious viral disease with a distinctive rash. It mostly affects children and is frequently called fifth disease because it was the fifth of five illnesses described exhibiting somewhat similar rashes. The incubation period has been estimated from family studies to range from 7 -28 days (average, 16 days).

What does the disease look like? - There are generally no symptoms of cold or congestion. Fever is absent or low grade. The illness usually begins with the sudden appearance of red cheeks, giving the child a "slapped cheek" appearance. A rash then appears on the trunk and extremities and as it fades, develops a lacy appearance. The rash lasts from 2-3 days and recurs for weeks and sometimes months. It is occasionally itchy, and can appear worse after exercise, warm *baths*, rubbing of the skin, emotional upset or exposure to sunlight. Joint pain or even frank arthritis occurs rarely in children, but commonly in adults, especially women. It is not unusual for adults with fifth disease to be misdiagnosed as having rheumatoid arthritis or Lyme disease.

What is the treatment? No treatment is indicated. Isolation is not required. Children are usually most contagious in the one to two weeks before the rash appears. Since the illness is mild and the duration of the rash may be prolonged, children with this disease should be allowed to attend school.

What causes Fifth Disease? - Fifth Disease is caused by human parvovirus B19. Illness with parvovirus will cause life long immunity and protect children against future illness. Infection with parvovirus B19 is cause for concern during pregnancy. Women who have long-term close exposure to the disease, such as mothers who have an infected child at home or teachers in a school with an epidemic, are at higher risk of becoming infected than women with more casual exposure. If you are exposed to fifth disease in the first trimester or early second trimester, you are at increased risk of miscarriage and should notify your obstetrician.