



FACT SHEET

# Parvovirus B19

## Slapped Cheek Syndrome

### What is Parvovirus B19?

Parvovirus B19, or “Slapped Cheek Syndrome”, is a common childhood viral infection characterised by fever, tiredness, runny nose, and joint pains, followed by a bright red rash on the cheeks (“slapped” cheeks) and a generalised “lacy” rash on the trunk that spreads down the arms and legs. The rash lasts 7-10 days and is sometimes itchy, and sometimes it comes and goes. Adults may have no symptoms at all, or may develop a rash, joint pains or swelling, or both. The joint symptoms usually resolve in a week or two, but can last longer.

Rarely, parvovirus B19 infection of a pregnant woman can cause severe anaemia in her unborn baby. This occurs in less than 5% of all pregnant women who are infected with parvovirus B19 and usually occurs during the first half of pregnancy. There is no evidence that parvovirus B19 infection causes birth defects.

### How common is it?

About 60% of people have had Parvovirus B19 by 30 years of age. Most infections occur between 5 and 15 years of age. People who have had Parvovirus B19 are usually immune to it for life. Parvovirus B19 only infects humans and cannot be transmitted to or from animals.

### How is it spread?

The virus is spread by infected respiratory secretions (e.g. by close contact with an infectious person), or from mother to unborn baby. After exposure to an infectious person, it usually takes 5-7 days (range 4-21 days) for symptoms to start, or 14-21 days for the rash to start. Infected persons are usually only infectious for several days before the rash starts (i.e. they are not infectious once the rash appears).

### How can it be prevented?

There is no vaccine or medicine that prevents parvovirus B19 infection. Excluding persons with parvovirus 19 infection from work, child care facilities, schools, or other settings is not recommended since these persons are only infectious before the rash starts. Also, because it is not possible to easily identify infectious persons, routinely excluding pregnant women from a workplace where an outbreak of B19 infection is occurring is not recommended. However, a pregnant woman may choose (in consultation with her doctor, employer, and family) to exclude herself from a workplace where an outbreak of B19 infection is occurring if she wants to minimise the risk of infection. In these cases, it is recommended that the pregnant woman has a parvovirus B19 blood test to show either that she is immune from previous infection, that she is not immune and could be infected if exposed, or that she has had a recent infection.

### Where can I get more information?

Ask your GP, local Population Health Unit, community nurse, health worker, or use the Internet, e.g. [www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases) , [www.hpa.org.uk/infections](http://www.hpa.org.uk/infections) .

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