



Slapped Cheek Syndrome - Information for Parents

Slapped cheek syndrome is a viral infection that is most common in children, although it can affect anyone of any age. It usually affects children between the ages of 3 years and 15 years. Most cases develop during the late winter months or early spring. The most common symptom of slapped cheek syndrome is the appearance of a distinctive bright red rash on the cheeks.

What are the causes of slapped cheek syndrome?

Slapped cheek syndrome is caused by a virus called a parvovirus. It is an airborne virus that is spread in much the same way as the cold or flu viruses. It can be spread through coughs and sneezes that release tiny droplets of contaminated saliva which are then breathed in by another person. It's very difficult to prevent the spread of the virus as people are most contagious before their symptoms begin, so they are unaware that they are infected. Once you've been infected you should develop a lifelong immunity and not experience any further symptoms.

Incubation period

Variable; 4 -20 days to development of rash.

Symptoms

The symptoms of slapped cheek syndrome usually begin in the first couple of weeks after your child is exposed to the virus. The symptoms tend to follow three distinct stages.



Photo: http://www.nhs.uk/tools/documents/visual_guides/v2/data/baby_rashes/images/slideshow_13.jpg
'Slapped cheek' appearance of Parvovirus infection

First stage

The first stage is usually characterised by mild flu-like symptoms, such as: fever, sore throat, headache, upset stomach, feeling tired and itchy skin. In many cases these symptoms do not occur, or are so mild as to be barely noticeable.

During the first stage of symptoms, your child will be most contagious.





Second stage

Between three to seven days after the symptoms start, your child will develop a bright red rash on both cheeks (the so-called "slapped cheeks").

Third stage

The third stage of symptoms usually begins one to four days after the appearance of the "slapped cheek" rash. During this stage, the rash will usually spread to your child's chest, stomach, arms and thighs. The rash usually has a raised, lace-like appearance and may cause discomfort and itching. **By this time your child should no longer be infectious and they will be able to return to school without the risk of passing the infection to others.**



<http://pediatric-house-calls.djmed.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/rash-fifth-disease-parvovirus-b19.jpg>
'Lacy rash' typical of slapped cheek syndrome

What treatment will your child need?

Most children will not need treatment as slapped cheek syndrome is usually a very mild condition that passes in a few days. Occasionally it can last up to four or five weeks.

Symptoms such as headaches, high temperature or itchy skin can usually be treated with over-the-counter medications. You will probably only need to contact your general practitioner if one or both of the following occurs:

- Your child's temperature rises to 39C or above.
- Your child's symptoms suddenly worsen.

Preventing slapped cheek syndrome

To prevent the spread of slapped cheek syndrome try to make sure that everyone in your household washes their hands frequently in order to reduce the chances of the infection spreading. No vaccination is available.





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Pregnant women

If a pregnant woman is less than 21 weeks pregnant and has been in contact with a confirmed case of parvovirus (slapped cheek syndrome) infection, they must contact their obstetrician who will monitor them throughout their pregnancy as necessary. They may recommend serological testing to determine their susceptibility and refer for further medical follow-up if they are seronegative.

If you have any queries you can contact the Infectious Disease Prevention and Control unit on 2326 6122, 6111, 6119 or 6109 during office hours.



Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Directorate

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