

St Botolph's CE Primary School

17 April 2013

Dear Parent / Carer

We currently have children in school who have suffered/ are suffering from the childhood illness 'Slapped Cheek Syndrome' - previously known as 'Fifth Disease'. The most common symptom of slapped cheek syndrome is the appearance of a distinctive bright red rash on the cheeks. This is how the condition got its name.

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

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

Slapped cheek syndrome is caused by a virus called parvovirus B19. Parvovirus B19 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 is at this time that the virus is most infectious.

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.

Complications

There are three high-risk groups in which the parvovirus B19 can cause a much more serious infection and trigger a range of complications. These are listed below.

- People with certain blood disorders, such as [sickle cell anaemia](#). This is where the blood doesn't contain enough healthy red blood cells (anaemia) and infection can lead to a further and more severe loss of red blood cells.
- Pregnant women without immunity. Parvovirus B19 infection can increase the risk of a [miscarriage](#) because the virus can cause severe anaemia in the unborn child.
- People with a weakened immune system (immunocompromised), either due to a side effect of treatment, such as [chemotherapy](#), or from a condition such as [HIV](#). These groups can experience prolonged, and sometime severe, symptoms of infection.

If you're in one of these high-risk groups and you have been in close contact with someone who goes on to develop slapped cheek syndrome, contact your GP for advice. You can also find more information here: <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Slapped-cheek-syndrome>

Mrs. D Wilson

Headteacher