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Fifth Disease

While this is not usually a serious illness, certain groups of persons may experience major problems if infected. Local health officials advise notifying parents and persons in these groups of the occurrence of outbreaks of Fifth Disease in school or other childcare settings. Persons at risk include those with chronic blood disorders including sickle cell disease, leukemia and immune deficiencies and pregnant women. There is a very small but definite risk of miscarriage or stillbirth in pregnant women who are infected with the virus causing Fifth Disease during pregnancy.

Symptoms of Fifth Disease include a bright red rash, usually starting on the cheeks followed by a lace-like rash on the trunk, arms and legs. Persons with this illness may also experience aching in the joints, especially those of the hands, knees and wrists. When the rash appears, Fifth Disease is no longer contagious.

Parents of children with the above chronic conditions may wish to contact their pediatrician regarding this outbreak. Pregnant mothers or other household contacts may wish to notify their obstetrician should their child develop any of the above symptoms. While it is not known exactly how the Fifth Disease virus is spread, good hand washing may prevent infection of other household members. Please keep in mind that this is not a new disease and that the risk of severe problems associated with this illness is small.