

Slapped Cheek Information Sheet

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What is it?

Slapped Cheek is a virus also called "Fifth disease" or "Erythema infectiosum". It usually effects children between the ages of 3-15, but anyone can get it. It causes bright red cheeks – like you've been slapped – and a lace-like rash on the body.



Photos from www.dermnetnz.org

What are the signs and symptoms?

Early symptoms may include:

- mild fever

- chills
- headache
- body ache
- sore throat
- diarrhoea.

After about a week these symptoms get better and a rash develops. This starts with bright red cheeks that are burning hot. A fine, red, lace-like rash then spreads over your body, arms and legs. The rash may be itchy and may seem to get worse when a child is hot or upset. The rash usually lasts for 2 weeks but may last up to 6 weeks.

How serious is it?

For children, Slapped Cheek is usually a mild illness and not serious.

Adults who get Slapped Cheek are less likely to have a rash but may get painful, swollen joints, especially in their hands and feet. The joint pain may last for 1–2 weeks and up to 6 weeks.

Who is most at risk?

Slapped Cheek usually effects children aged 3-15 but anyone can get it.

How could I get infected?

You get infected when you swallow or breathe in the virus. Slapped Cheek is passed on through saliva or mucus from the mouth, nose or throat. An infected person can spread the virus to other people by coughing, sneezing or talking. Symptoms usually appear within 3 weeks of being exposed to the virus.

If you get Slapped Cheek, you can infect other people for 5 or 6 days before your first symptom appears. You'll stop being infectious once the rash appears.

How do I protect myself and others?

If you are exposed to Slapped Cheek, try to stop it spreading by making sure you and your children:

- wash your hands often
- cover your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing
- Do not share food, eating utensils and drink bottles.

Also try to avoid contact with pregnant women and people who have low resistance to disease.

Will I need to take time off work, school or preschool?

You do NOT need to stay at home or keep your child home from preschool or school unless they are feeling unwell.

How is it treated?

There is no specific treatment for Slapped Cheek as it is a virus and can't be fixed with antibiotics. You can treat the symptoms and keep your child comfortable by:

- letting them have plenty of rest
- giving paracetamol to reduce any fever
- using cold cloths to sooth hot cheeks
- making sure they drink plenty of water.

Where can I get further information?

For further information on Slapped Cheek please contact your doctor or Hawke's Bay District Health Board Population Health on (06) 834 1815. You can also phone Healthline on 0800 611 116 at any time of the day or night to speak to a registered nurse.