



Health Fact Sheet: Slapped Cheek Syndrome

What is slapped cheek syndrome?

Slapped cheek syndrome is a common childhood viral infection. However it can affect people of all ages. The most common symptom of slapped cheek syndrome is the appearance of a bright red rash on both cheeks (hence the name). Slapped cheek syndrome is caused by a virus called parovirus B19.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of slapped cheek syndrome usually begin 4-14 days after a child develops the parovirus B19 infection. The symptoms usually follow three distinct stages.

The first stage, when a person is most contagious, is usually characterized by mild flu like symptoms such as:

- A high temperature
- Sore throat
- Headache
- Upset stomach
- Fatigue
- Itchy skin

The second stage is between 3-7 days after the onset of symptoms, a bright red rash develops on both cheeks, the so called 'slapped cheeks'. The rash may be particularly noticeable in bright sunlight.

The third stage of symptoms usually begins 1-4 days after the appearance of the 'slapped cheek' rash. During this stage the rash usually spreads to the chest, stomach, arms and thighs. The rash usually has a raised lace like appearance, and may cause discomfort and itching. By this stage the viral infection should no longer be contagious and a child may be able to return to school without the risk of passing on the infection to others.



How to treat?

Relief of symptoms include:

- Painkillers, such as paracetamol or ibuprofen, can be used to relieve symptoms such as high temperature, headache and joint pain.
- Antihistamines can be used to relieve the symptoms of itchy skin
- Another way to relieve the symptoms of itchy skin is the use of moisturizing lotions
- Ensuring that plenty of rest and fluids are taken as this will also relieve the symptoms of sore throat and a high temperature.

How does it spread?

Slapped cheek syndrome is spread in the same way as a cold or flu. When an infected person coughs, sneezes or laughs they release tiny droplets of contaminated saliva which can be breathed in by another person. The infection can also be spread by hand to hand contact.

How to prevent?

To prevent the spread of slapped cheek syndrome it is important that hand hygiene is carried out frequently to prevent the spread of infection.