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Slapped Cheek Disease

## What should pregnant women do?

Most pregnant women are immune to this germ (virus), or will not be seriously affected if they become infected by it. However, like some other viruses, the virus that causes slapped cheek disease can sometimes harm an unborn child. Miscarriage is more common in women who are infected with this virus before 20 weeks of pregnancy.

If you develop a rash during your pregnancy or come into contact with a person with a rash then you should seek medical advice. Your doctor will usually arrange for you to have a blood test to see if you have had slapped cheek disease in the past. If this is the case then you can be reassured and will not need other tests or treatment.

However, if the test does not show that you have had slapped cheek disease in the past, then you may need to have other blood tests and also other tests - for example, a scan of your unborn baby.

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## What is slapped cheek disease?

Slapped cheek disease is an infection caused by the parvovirus B19 virus. It most commonly occurs in children aged 3-15 years, but anyone can be affected.

The infectious period is for 4-20 days **before** the rash appears. By the time the rash develops, it is usually no longer infectious.

In the UK, April and May are the peak months for this condition. However, it may occur at any time.

Approximately 50-60% of people in the UK have had this infection in the past, usually without realising it. You only have slapped cheek disease only once in a lifetime. This is because you make antibodies during the infection which protect you from future infections with this same germ (virus).

**Note**: Pet dogs or cats can be immunised against parvovirus. However, these are animal parvoviruses which are different from parvovirus B19.

**Are there any tests for slapped cheek disease?**

This condition is usually diagnosed by the appearance of the classical rash on your cheeks.

**Are there any complications from slapped cheek disease?**

Usually not. Rarely, the aching joint symptoms last for some time after the other symptoms have gone.

The only times the illness may become more serious are:

* In children with some types of hereditary anaemia such as [sickle cell disease](http://www.patient.co.uk/health/Sickle-Cell-Disease-and-Sickle-Cell-Anaemia.htm), [beta-thalassaemia](http://www.patient.co.uk/doctor/thalassaemia-pro) and [hereditary spherocytosis](http://www.patient.co.uk/health/Hereditary-Spherocytosis.htm). This germ (virus) can cause these types of anaemia to become suddenly much worse.
* In people with a weakened immune system. If you have leukaemia or cancer, have had an organ transplant or have HIV infection then you may develop a more serious illness with this infection.

## What is the treatment for slapped cheek disease?

* You do not usually need any treatment. If you have a headache, temperature (fever) or aches and pains then painkillers such as [paracetamol](http://www.patient.co.uk/medicine/paracetamol) or [ibuprofen](http://www.patient.co.uk/medicine/ibuprofen-for-pain-and-inflammation) will help.

**What are the symptoms of slapped cheek disease?**

**Rash**

Typically, the rash looks like a bright red scald on one or both cheeks. It looks as if the cheek(s) have been slapped. Sometimes there is just a blotchy redness on the face. The rash is painless.

Sometimes a more widespread faint rash appears on the body, arms, and legs. Occasionally, the rash on the face and body keeps fading and returning several times for up to several weeks. However, it is more common for the rash to come and go completely within a few days.

**Other symptoms**

Although the rash can look quite dramatic, the illness itself is usually mild. You will usually not feel too ill. You may have a headache, sore throat, runny nose or mild temperature (fever) that last for a few days and occur around 7-10 days before the rash appears. Occasionally, mild pain and stiffness develop in one or more joints for a few days. This is more common in adults than in children.

**You may have no symptoms**

Around one in four people who become infected with this germ (virus) do not develop any symptoms at all. Some people just have a fever and feel generally unwell, without any rashes.