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## SELF-CARE INFORMATION ON SLAPPED CHEEK

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Slapped cheek is a viral infection caused by the *human parvovirus B19*. It is also called *fifth disease* or *erythema infectiosum*.

Slapped cheek is common and usually affects children between the ages of 4 and 10 years but can happen at any age.

Most children who get slapped cheek do not have any symptoms, and if they do the symptoms are usually very mild. A common symptom is cheeks that look like they have been slapped, which is where the virus gets its name.

Slapped cheek is not life threatening and complications are rare.



### Signs and symptoms

It may take between 4 and 14 days after your child is exposed to slapped cheek for any symptoms to show. The symptoms can vary and are usually so mild that many parents won't realise that their child has had the virus. They include:

- Initially fever, headache, stomach upsets, aches, and pains.
- After a few days of being unwell, a bright red rash may appear on the cheeks.
- A different rash on their chest, back, arms and legs, which looks like a pink lace pattern on the skin.
- Rashes can come and go for several weeks, or even months, especially if the skin is exposed to sunlight or after exercise.

## How is slapped cheek spread?

Slapped cheek is spread by touching or breathing in the coughed or sneezed fluid drops from an infected person. Children with slapped cheek are contagious until *24 hours after their fever has resolved*. They will not be able to spread the infection to other people after this time, even if they have a rash.

Often parents won't know their child has slapped cheek. However, if your child is unwell with a fever, keeping them home from childcare, nursery or school will help prevent them spreading the illness to others.

## Management

Most children do not need any treatment, except for rest to allow the body to fight the infection. Because slapped cheek is caused by a virus, antibiotics are not given to children with slapped cheek as antibiotics do not treat viruses.

You can give your child paracetamol or ibuprofen to help them feel more comfortable if they are bothered by a fever or aches and pains.

You can use an emollient moisturiser on the skin and antihistamine medication if the skin is irritable- discuss this with your pharmacist.

## When to see a doctor

A few children with slapped cheek develop *swelling and pain in the joints* of their hands and feet. If this happens, speak to your GP for advice on how to treat these symptoms.

If your child has sickle cell anaemia, severe anaemia, is taking long-term steroids or is *immunocompromised* (has a weakened immune system) due to a medical condition or medical treatment, speak to your child's GP or medical team if you suspect your child has slapped cheek.

If you are *pregnant* and have been exposed to someone with slapped cheek, speak to your GP.

If your child is unwell with a fever and a skin rash (small bright red spots or purple spots or unexplained bruises) that does not turn to skin-colour (blanch) when you press on it, this may be a sign of meningococcal infection.

## Key points to remember

- Symptoms can vary between children, and the infection can show very few symptoms.
- Slapped cheek is caused by a virus and antibiotics will not work to treat it.
- 24 hours after the fever goes away (or by the time the rash develops), a child with a rash is not able to spread the infection to others.
- The rashes will normally fade within a week or two, although occasionally the body rash may come and go for a few weeks after the infection has passed.

## Useful contacts

- Ask your pharmacist
- Patient UK - [www.patient.co.uk](http://www.patient.co.uk)
- NHS Choices, [www.nhs.uk/conditions/](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/)

## If you have further questions:

Call the **practice** on *01285 653184 or 01285 653122*  
If you require **urgent** medical advice, call *111 (24 Hrs)*  
In an **emergency** call **999**