

# Slapped cheek syndrome

Slapped cheek syndrome (also called fifth disease) is common in children and should get better on its own within 3 weeks. It's rarer in adults, but can be more serious.

## Check if it's slapped cheek syndrome

The first sign of slapped cheek syndrome is usually feeling unwell for a few days.

Symptoms may include:

- a high temperature
- a runny nose and sore throat
- a headache



A red rash may appear on 1 or both cheeks. It may be less obvious on brown and black skin. Adults do not usually get the rash on their face.



A few days later, a spotty rash may appear on the chest, arms and legs. The rash can be raised and itchy. It may be harder to see on brown and black skin.

## How long it lasts

The cheek rash usually fades within 2 weeks.

The body rash also fades within 2 weeks, but sometimes lasts for up to a month, especially if you're exercising, hot, anxious or stressed.

Adults might also have joint pain and stiffness. This can happen in children too, but it's rare. Joint pain can continue for many weeks, even after the other symptoms have gone.

## If you're not sure your child has slapped cheek syndrome

Look at other rashes in babies and children (Link: [www.nhs.uk/conditions/rashes-babies-and-children/](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/rashes-babies-and-children/)).

## Things you can do yourself

You do not usually need to see a GP for slapped cheek syndrome.

There are some things you can do to ease the symptoms.

### Do

- ✓ rest
- ✓ drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration (Link: [www.nhs.uk/conditions/dehydration/](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/dehydration/)) – babies should continue their normal feeds
- ✓ take paracetamol (Link: [www.nhs.uk/medicines/paracetamol-for-children/](http://www.nhs.uk/medicines/paracetamol-for-children/)) or ibuprofen (Link: [www.nhs.uk/medicines/ibuprofen-for-children/](http://www.nhs.uk/medicines/ibuprofen-for-children/)) for a high temperature, headaches or joint pain
- ✓ use moisturiser on itchy skin
- ✓ speak to a pharmacist about itchy skin (Link: [www.nhs.uk/conditions/itchy-skin/](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/itchy-skin/)) – they can recommend the best antihistamine (Link: [www.nhs.uk/conditions/antihistamines/](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/antihistamines/)) for children

### Don't

- ✗ do not give aspirin to children under 16

### Important

Tell your midwife or a GP if you're pregnant or have a weakened immune system and have been near someone with slapped cheek syndrome.

### See a GP if:

you think you have slapped cheek syndrome and:

- you're pregnant – there's a very small risk of miscarriage (Link: [www.nhs.uk/conditions/miscarriage/](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/miscarriage/)) or other complications
- you have a blood disorder, such as sickle cell disease (Link: [www.nhs.uk/conditions/sickle-cell-disease/](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/sickle-cell-disease/)) or thalassaemia (Link: [www.nhs.uk/conditions/thalassaemia/](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/thalassaemia/)) – there's a risk of severe anaemia
- you have a weakened immune system – for example, because of chemotherapy or diabetes

### Ask for an urgent appointment if you have:

- very pale skin
- shortness of breath
- extreme tiredness
- fainting

These can be signs of severe anaemia and you might be sent to hospital for a blood transfusion (Link: [www.nhs.uk/conditions/blood-transfusion/](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/blood-transfusion/)).

## How slapped cheek syndrome is spread

It's hard to avoid spreading slapped cheek syndrome because most people do not know they have it until they get the rash.

You can only spread it to other people before the rash appears.

Slapped cheek syndrome is caused by a virus (parvovirus B19). The virus spreads to other people, surfaces or objects by coughing or sneezing near them.

To reduce the risk of spreading the virus:

- wash your hands often with water and soap
- use tissues to trap germs when you cough or sneeze
- bin used tissues as quickly as possible

You do not have to stay off work or school after the rash appears.

Let the school or teacher know if your child has slapped cheek syndrome.

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