



Fifth disease reported in Muskingum Co.

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COSHOCOTON -- A mild illness accompanied by a rash called fifth disease has cropped up in Muskingum County, affecting several children and at least one adult. However, health department authorities in Coshocton County and the city said they have not received any reports of the disease.

Fifth disease, most commonly found in children, is caused by the parvovirus B19 and is characterized by a rash appearing on the face and limbs. The tell-tale rash, which appears to be a lacy or marble-like rash, often is called a "slapped cheek" rash because of the way it appears on the face.

The disease is transmitted by direct or indirect contact with "respiratory secretions," according to Becky Beiter, director of nursing with the Coshocton County Health Department. Children can be infectious for five days before the rash appears through two days after.

Beiter said the disease is most common in daycare situations, specifically in children ages 4 to 14.

Fifth disease is not a reportable condition in Ohio, said Kristopher Weiss, spokesman for the Ohio Department of Health. As a result, ODH did not have any data on the number of cases in the last five years for either Ohio or Coshocton County.

So far, students in the Coshocton City, Ridgewood and River View local school districts have not been affected.

"I am not aware of any children out with it at this time," said Jo Ann Wolfgang, school nurse for Coshocton City schools.

The state does not require children miss school if they have the viral infection, said Barbara Bond, Ridgewood school nurse.

"It's no more contagious than a common cold and we don't exclude kids for a cold," she said.

Shelley McPeck, River View school nurse, said no cases at Warsaw or in the elementary schools have been reported.

It is a different story in Muskingum County. Duncan Falls resident Tracie Moyer contracted fifth disease along with several of the children she watches.

Dr. Vicki Whitacre, Zanesville-Muskingum County Health Department medical director, has seen three cases in the last couple of weeks. Late winter and early spring is the peak season.

She said the disease gets its name because it's the fifth in a line of diseases which causes rashes such as the measles. It is spread just like the common cold, through respiratory secretions, like saliva.

However, a person can be carrying the virus in them from four to 28 days without knowing it. The rash is the first sign that a person was a carrier. However, as soon as the rash shows up it means the person is getting over it.

There is no immunization for the disease, and Whitacre said those who have it need to rest. Sunlight, stress and exercise can bring the symptoms back.

The symptoms are worse for those with blood-related diseases such as leukemia or sickle cell anemia.

For adults the disease can mean an onset of not just the rash, but arthritis-type pain.

This is what Moyer is experiencing. She has had joint pain in all parts of her body for about the past month.

"It hurts all night when I'm trying to find a comfortable way to sleep. It's not in any one spot, but seems to be worse in the ankles, wrists and knees," she said.

Getting up, walking and even doing simple household tasks causes pain and Moyer has no idea how long it will last. She was told by her doctor that she could have symptoms for up to six months, or longer.

"I'm trying to stay positive," she said.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, about 50 percent of adults have been previously infected and therefore have an immunity to the disease.

Since 50 percent of adults are typically immune, there is not usually any serious complications for pregnant women. However, in rare cases the unborn baby will have severe anemia or a woman might have a miscarriage.

According to the CDC, this occurs in less than 5 percent of all pregnant women.

Pregnant women who suspect they have the disease should contact their doctors in the first trimester, Beiter said.

