

# TIMES RECORDER

## Fifth disease appearing in area

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Mild illness, rash spreads like common cold, not considered dangerous

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ZANESVILLE -- A mild illness accompanied by a rash called fifth disease has cropped up in Muskingum County affecting several children and at least one adult.

Fifth disease, which is most commonly found in children, is caused by the parvovirus B19 and is characterized by a rash appearing on the face and limbs.

"I had never heard of it," said Tracie Moyer, of Duncan Falls, who has contracted it along with several of the children she watches.

It was a couple of weeks before Easter when the first children came down with it. The children had the tell-tale rash, which appears to be a lacy or marble-like rash often called a "slapped cheek" rash because of the way it appears on the face.

At first no one -- parents or Moyer -- knew what it was besides a rash. But then a trip to the doctor by one of the children revealed it to be fifth disease.

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 for appearances.

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, but as soon as the rash shows up it means the person is getting over it.

"I haven't seen any cases in quite a while," Whitacre said.

The first child she did see was an elementary school age boy, but she said the rash was on his legs, not his face. It wasn't until the boy's sister was brought in a few days later that she recognized the "slapped cheek" rash and knew it was fifth disease.

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 like 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.

It is not a reportable disease, so the health department does not know how many cases may be in the area.

In all, two of the five children Moyer baby-sits on a regular basis contracted it along with four of the six school age children who come to her house before school.

Angie Joseph's two children, Quade, 8, and Tyler, 4, who are watched by Moyer, came down with it.

"I thought (Quade) had an allergic reaction to something. He had been in the mulch at the

ballpark and I told him not to get dirty, but of course he came back and he was covered in mulch," she aid.

After his bath, she noticed his cheeks were broken out in a rash and his face appeared swollen. She gave him some Benadryl, but when that didn't work she took him to the doctor. He was given some allergy medication, but then Moyer told her about fifth disease. Like Moyer, Joseph had never heard of it.

Quade had it all over, from his face and ears to arms and legs. And it itched. The rash lasted for several weeks. But then, just last week, Tyler's rash appeared.

Unlike his brother, Tyler's rash is mainly on his arms and legs and doesn't itch.

While her children seem OK, Joseph has been concerned about people who her children may have been around -- particularly those who may be pregnant.

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 possibility a woman will have a miscarriage. According to the CDC this occurs in less than 5 percent of all pregnant women.

Meanwhile, the principal at Quade's school -- Duncan Falls Elementary -- said the staff does know there have been a few cases of fifth disease within the school.

"We're watching it," Steve Rice said.