

Women's Health **UPDATE**

Protecting Pregnancies

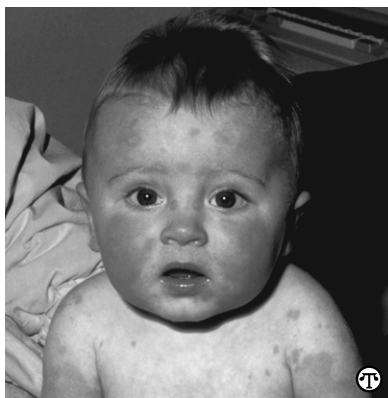
(NAPSA)—New studies show pregnant women should know their immune status from a common and sometimes dangerous condition: Fifth disease.

Fifth disease is a viral illness caused by parvovirus B19. The disease, which is characterized by the appearance of red, “slapped cheeks,” is a common illness in children and adults and has no lasting effect on healthy people. However, if contracted during pregnancy, Fifth disease may cause complications to the health of a fetus. In fact, the condition is estimated to account for 3,000 fetal deaths in North America every year.

According to a recent study conducted by Labor Enders, Stuttgart, Germany, Fifth disease is a serious threat to the health of unborn babies—particularly in the first 20 weeks of pregnancy. “Getting a blood test can tell a woman if she is immune to Fifth disease or if she has been recently infected by the virus that causes it,” says Dr. Amanda Corcoran, Ph.D., the author of a recent review on Fifth disease. A simple FDA-cleared test for the disease is available from the company Biotrin International.

People who are not immune to Fifth disease can contract it through contact with infected people. Infections often occur as outbreaks, usually at schools. Often, a clinician can diagnose Fifth disease by simply observing its symptoms on a person’s face. In a recent study, however, 73 percent of pregnant women who tested positive for Fifth disease infection did not have a rash. In these cases, the only way to diagnose it is by a blood test.

Pregnant women who do not know if they are immune to Fifth disease—and especially women



A baby exhibits what doctors say is a typical Fifth disease rash.

who believe they have been exposed to the virus—should see a doctor. If the virus is detected, treatment options are available to protect the fetus.

Dr. Corcoran says that not every woman who is susceptible will develop an infection when exposed to the virus. If a blood test (called a serological screening) shows that a pregnant woman is not immune to Fifth disease and she has been exposed to the virus, weekly ultrasounds will most likely be carried out to determine the presence of the disease. If the virus is detected in the unborn baby, the fetus can be treated with a process known as intrauterine transfusion.

“Until a vaccine is developed, the best way to protect your baby is to find out if you are immune to Fifth disease, to avoid situations where outbreaks are possible and to monitor your pregnancy and initiate treatment for your unborn baby if needed,” says Dr. Corcoran.

For more information, visit www.fifthdisease.org.