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# Hand washing best defence against common viral infection

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## Hand washing best defence against common viral infection

Posted on Wednesday 15th May 2013

Public health experts at Cumbria County Council are reminding people to wash their hands regularly following several reported cases of 'slapped cheek syndrome' in the county.

Although a usually mild condition, slapped cheek syndrome (also known as 'fifth disease') can be highly infectious. Its name is given because of the common symptom of a distinctive bright red rash on the cheeks.

The condition is usually very mild and passes in a few days. Occasionally it can last up to four or five weeks. Although it mainly affects children aged 3 to 15 years it can affect anyone of any age. It is common during the winter and spring months.

During April (2013) 10 cases were recorded in Cumbria – mainly in the north and west of the county Symptoms can include headaches, high temperature or itchy skin which can usually be treated with over-the-counter medications such as paracetamol and antihistamines.

People will probably only need to contact their GP if one or both of the following occurs:

- Your (or your child's) temperature rises to 39C or above.
- Your (or your child's) symptoms suddenly worsen.

The condition is caused by the paravirus which is an airborne virus that is spread in much the same way as the cold or flu viruses. To prevent the spread of slapped cheek syndrome people should try to make sure that everyone in their household washes their hands frequently in order to reduce the chances of the infection spreading.

Although slapped cheek syndrome is a mild conditions in most people, there are some groups in which the virus can cause a much more serious infection and trigger complications.

These are: people with certain blood disorders (such as sickle cell anaemia) pregnant women who have not had the condition previously, and people with a weakened immune system.

People in one of these groups who has been in close contact with someone who goes on to develop slapped cheek syndrome, should contact your GP for advice.

Dr Rebecca Wagstaff, Cumbria County Council's Acting Director of Public Health, said: "Slapped cheek syndrome is a usually mild virus. It can be spread through coughs and sneezes that release tiny droplets of contaminated saliva which are then breathed in by another person.

"It's very difficult to prevent the spread of the virus as people are most contagious before their symptoms begin, so they are unaware that they are infected.

"Once you've been infected you should develop a lifelong immunity and not experience any further symptoms.

"The best way to prevent the spread of slapped cheek syndrome, or other infections, is to your wash hands regularly." More information on the parvovirus is available at:

[www.hpa.org.uk/Topics/InfectiousDiseases/InfectionsAZ/ParvovirusB19/GeneralInformation/](http://www.hpa.org.uk/Topics/InfectiousDiseases/InfectionsAZ/ParvovirusB19/GeneralInformation/)

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