

OTTAWA-CARLETON DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Fifth Disease

Protocol for Schools Dealing With Pregnant Employees

BACKGROUND

For most people, Fifth Disease can be viewed as an unimportant rash illness which spreads from person to person similarly to the common cold. While the disease has no significant health concerns for affected children, it may present serious health problems for pregnant women and for people with chronic blood disorders such as sickle cell disease or leukemia. A child who has contracted Fifth Disease will display a rash on his or her face which gives the appearance of a hand slap (a more wide spread rash will appear a few days later). However, like chicken pox, the contagious period for this disease occurs before the rash appears.

Several outbreaks of Fifth Disease have been reported in our schools over the past few years. In these cases, the most pressing concern is how to deal with pregnant staff in the school. For this reason, the following protocol has been developed to ensure that the Board is responding in a responsible fashion and to ensure that the employees are treated in a fair and consistent manner.

PROTOCOL

1. The school principal, manager or supervisor is responsible for:
 - a) educating staff, students and parents about the symptoms of Fifth Disease and measures to be taken to reduce exposure to it;
 - b) requesting that such symptoms be reported to the responsible principal, manager or supervisor;
 - c) if there is some evidence of presence of the disease but no known outbreak at the time, requesting that students obtain a medical diagnosis to confirm whether or not the disease is present; and
 - d) where there are two or more physician-diagnosed cases of Fifth Disease at a school/location within three weeks, contacting the Board's Health and Safety Officer, who will immediately notify the City Health Department.

Note: The City Health Department will track this information, and will notify school boards and day care facilities of the onset of Fifth Disease season.

2. Employees who are at risk of health problems from Fifth Disease for one or more of the reasons identified above are advised to determine through testing whether they are susceptible to this disease. In particular:
 - a) any employee who is pregnant is strongly advised to be tested at an early stage of pregnancy; and
 - b) any employee who is considering starting a family is encouraged to be tested.
3. Should an outbreak of the disease be confirmed at an employee's school or location, it is the responsibility of an employee who may be at risk, and does not know whether she or he has immunity, to be tested at his/her cost at the earliest possible time. The employee may use sick leave entitlement or personal leave in order to visit the doctor and obtain the required tests and results.
4. In the case of a confirmed outbreak, an employee who has been tested and found susceptible to Fifth Disease, and who is at risk, as a result of this outbreak, of health problems for one or more of the reasons identified above, will, until the outbreak is over (20 days with no confirmed cases):
 - a) be accommodated by way of reassignment to another work location; or
 - b) if the employer determines that reassignment is not possible, be granted leave of absence with pay; or
 - c) if the employee does not wish to be reassigned, the employee may use sick leave with pay pursuant to the employee's collective agreement.
5. If an employee who is potentially susceptible to the disease chooses not to be tested, the Board will allow the employee to use sick leave entitlement to cover the time lost from work for the duration of a confirmed outbreak of Fifth Disease.
6. If an employee found susceptible to Fifth Disease does not wish to remain in a school/location for fear of potential exposure, although no presence of the disease has been confirmed, the Board will grant an unpaid leave of absence for the period requested.
7. An employee who is found as a result of testing to have immunity from Fifth Disease is required to report to work.