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## Parvovirus warning for pregnant women

Doctors are warning pregnant women about the spread of Parvovirus and the need to take extra care.

Parvovirus, often referred to as Slapped Cheek Syndrome or Fifth Disease, is a viral illness that mostly affects children and is generally a mild condition. The virus usually resolves itself however, if contracted by a pregnant woman, it can cause serious complications to their unborn baby.

The virus, which is airborne, is often contracted from children through coughing and sneezing and is common in places like childcare centres and schools, particularly in Spring.

“Most women have not heard of Parvovirus and are unaware of the damage it can do to their unborn baby,” Associate Professor Daniel Challis, Medical Advisor to the NSW Pregnancy and Newborn Services Network said.

“If a pregnant woman is infected with Parvovirus and the infection is transmitted to her fetus, there is a very serious risk the baby could become severely anaemic or die in-utero.”

The risk of complications from Parvovirus is highest if a pregnant woman contracts the virus between 12 – 20 weeks gestation.

Across NSW, there are approximately a dozen serious cases of Parvovirus in pregnant women every year.

“More than 50% of pregnant women will have already contracted the virus when they were a child which means they, and their unborn baby, will now be immune.”

“However, it is still important that all pregnant women are aware of the symptoms of Parvovirus and the risks it may pose so that they can prevent contracting it, or otherwise, seek appropriate medical treatment,” A/Prof Challis said.

In children, Parvovirus is characterised by a ‘slapped cheek’ rash on the face and a lacy red rash on the trunk and limbs. Children may also develop cold-like symptoms or a fever.

In adults, symptoms may include the red rash and/or joint pain or swelling in the hands, wrists and knees on both sides of the body however, these symptoms are often very mild and often go unnoticed.

“If there is a known case of Parvovirus or a pregnant woman thinks she has been exposed, it is really important she sees her GP, midwife or obstetrician to arrange a blood test,” A/Prof Challis said.

For women who do test positive to the infection, their pregnancy will be followed with ultrasound scans every week for 10-12 weeks to monitor the baby’s health and if necessary, treatment will be given to prevent the baby becoming anaemic.

To prevent contracting Parvovirus, pregnant women are advised to wash their hands regularly, be vigilant with cleaning contaminated surfaces, avoid places with known cases of Parvovirus (this may mean taking time off work), and if concerned, see their GP.