



## **FIFTH DISEASE PROTOCOL FOR PREGNANT EMPLOYEES**

### **BACKGROUND**

Fifth Disease is a common and harmless condition that afflicts young children. A child who has contracted Fifth Disease will display a rash on his or her face that 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 is before the rash appears. Consequently, other children will have been exposed prior to an outbreak being detected. The outbreak can only be considered finished once 20 days have passed with no further confirmed cases. While the disease is relatively harmless, and in fact is not legally reportable according to the Health Department, it can present some serious risks to the fetus of a pregnant women infected with the disease.

Several outbreaks of Fifth Disease have been reported in our schools over the last few years. In these cases, the most pressing concern is how to deal with pregnant employees 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 employees are treated in a fair and consistent manner.

### **PROTOCOL**

#### **I Education**

- Principals should educate employees and students (parents) about the symptoms of Fifth Disease and ask that symptoms be reported.
- Principals should educate employees about the measures to be taken to reduce exposure to the disease.

#### **II Detection of Outbreaks**

- If there is some evidence of presence of the disease and there is no known outbreak at the time, students should be asked to obtain a medical diagnosis.

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- Request that the City of Ottawa's Public Health Department advise the Board of any new studies or research which suggest a heightened risk to fetuses exposed to Fifth Disease. In addition, that the Public Health Department request from the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario notification of the onset of the Fifth Disease 'season' as well as any unusual rate of incidences of Fifth Disease and that the Public Health Department notify the Board of the same.

### **III Reassignment of Pregnant Employees**

- Pregnant employees are encouraged to obtain the blood test that will confirm whether or not they have the anti-bodies against Fifth Disease. Employees should consult their own doctor regarding the test (costs for such a test will be at no cost to the Board). Employees who are immune from the disease are considered not at risk and are not the subject of this protocol.
- When an outbreak of Fifth Disease is confirmed, and an employee has not yet been tested for the anti-bodies, the employee may be paid sick leave (provided she has enough sick days available) while she meets with doctors and obtains the required tests or she may request to be reassigned to another school or department. She will remain on sick leave or at the other school or department until the results of the test are finalized. If the employee has already been tested and does not have the anti-bodies against Fifth Disease, the Board will reassign the employee to another school or department until the outbreak is over. The employee would not be reassigned to her school until there is no further evidence of an outbreak (20 days with no confirmed cases).
- Where a pregnant employee has been tested and found not to have the anti-bodies against Fifth Disease, and if the employee does not wish to remain in the school for fear of potential exposure (even when there has been no outbreak of the disease), the Board will grant an unpaid leave of absence for the period requested.

### **IV Ongoing Review**

The Board will periodically review this protocol to ensure that up to date medical information is considered and that the steps and measures taken by the Board are appropriate and fair