

Smallpox

Personal Health Fact Sheet

What is Smallpox?

Smallpox is a generalized illness caused by the variola virus. It is highly contagious and can be fatal. Smallpox was eradicated worldwide in 1977, so vaccination against the disease has ceased. Most people in the US are no longer immune to the disease, making smallpox a potential biological weapon. A single suspected case of smallpox would be treated as an international health emergency.

How is it spread?

Smallpox infection is acquired through the inhalation of an aerosolized virus, direct contact with fluid from the rash, or from handling clothing, bedding, or scabs from an infected person. Smallpox is spread from person to person, usually within families and between face to face contacts.

How is it treated?

- ▶ There is no specific treatment for the smallpox disease. The only prevention is vaccination.
- ▶ The CDC has an emergency supply of the vaccine.
- ▶ If given within 4 days of exposure, the vaccine can lessen the severity of or even prevent illness in people exposed to smallpox

How can we prepare for Smallpox?

- ▶ It is important that Health Care workers become familiar with the clinical features of the smallpox disease.
- ▶ It is important that public health departments prepare plans and procedures for community wide mass vaccination and exercise those plans.
- ▶ Voluntary vaccination of certain healthcare workers and public health professions occurred in 2003.

SYMPTOMS OF SMALLPOX

Symptoms usually occur 10-14 days after exposure.

- ▶ Fever
- ▶ Muscle rigidity
- ▶ Shivering
- ▶ Headaches
- ▶ Vomiting
- ▶ A rash develops in the following manner:
 - First appears as discolored spots appearing in the mouth & throat
 - The rash then appears on the face and forearms, spreading to the trunk and legs
 - The rash becomes fluid filled and then pus filled lesions



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