

# Smallpox



## *What is Smallpox?*

Smallpox is a serious life-threatening disease caused by a virus called *variola*. The last case of smallpox in the United States was in 1949. The last naturally occurring case in the world was in Somalia in 1977. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) classifies Smallpox as a Category A agent based on possible threat and danger to the public in the case of a bioterrorism event.

## *What are the Symptoms of Smallpox?*

Initial symptoms include flu-like aches and pains. This progresses to:

- High fever
- Fatigue
- Severe head and backache
- Rash appearing 2-4 days after fever starts

The rash begins as flat red spots in the mouth and throat, then appears on the face, arms, and legs at the same time. The spots become hard, raised bumps filled with pus that crust over to form a scab.

## *How is Smallpox spread?*

Smallpox spreads from person to person through close face-to-face contact during coughing or sneezing. Persons are most likely to spread the disease during the first week of illness. However, they may be contagious until all scabs have fallen off. This may take 3 to 4 weeks. Smallpox can also spread through direct contact with infected body fluids or objects (bedding, clothing) with the virus on them.

## *How is Smallpox treated?*

There is no proven cure for smallpox and 30% of those infected may die. Persons with the disease will be treated with supportive therapy such as IV fluids and medicines for fever and pain. Though the majority of persons do recover, there may be complications such as infection of brain tissue, blindness, and severe scarring.

## *How can Smallpox be prevented?*

If there is one verified case of Smallpox in the US, strict isolation and quarantine measures will be essential to prevent spread. Vaccination within 72 hours after exposure can prevent or significantly reduce severity of the disease. Vaccination within 4

to 7 days may offer some protection also. Routine vaccination in the United States ended in 1972. The CDC has stockpiled enough vaccine to vaccinate every US citizen in the event of an emergency.

## *What is the Smallpox Vaccine?*

Smallpox vaccine is made from a living virus called *vaccinia* that is like smallpox, but less harmful. The vaccine is not given like other vaccines. Instead, the skin is pricked a number of times with a drop of vaccine on a needle (usually the upper arm). The pricking is not deep, but will cause one or two small drops of blood to form. Protection from infection lasts 3 to 5 years and protection from severe illness and death may last 10 years or more. However, in the event of a Smallpox outbreak, all exposed persons should be vaccinated, even if they have received the vaccine before.

Source: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

## District Health Department #10

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