



## SMALLPOX

### **What is smallpox?**

Smallpox is a serious, contagious, and sometimes fatal virus. Before smallpox was eradicated, it was a serious infectious disease caused by the variola virus. The disease was eliminated worldwide after a successful vaccination program. The last case of smallpox in the United States was in 1949, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

### **Who gets smallpox?**

The individuals most at risk for getting smallpox are laboratory workers who work with the variola virus. It is possible that the variola virus could be used in a biological attack (an intentional release of viruses, bacteria, or other germs that can sicken or kill people, livestock, or crops). If smallpox becomes a concern, anyone is susceptible to getting it.

### **How is smallpox spread?**

Person-to-person transmission occurs when the infected person coughs or sneezes droplets and another person inhales them. Smallpox can also be spread through direct contact with infected bodily fluids or objects, such as bedding or clothing. The person is considered infected until all scabs separate from the skin and fall off.

### **What are the symptoms of smallpox?**

Symptoms are similar to a bad flu with a fever of 101 degrees Fahrenheit or higher, head and body aches, vomiting, and a severe backache that last for two to four days. Next, a rash begins on the face, hands, forearms, mouth, and throat, and often the palms and soles. The rash spreads to the legs and then to the trunk. It develops more on the arms and legs than on the chest area. The rash starts with flat, red lesions that become raised bumps. They become pus-filled blisters that crust, scab, and fall off after nearly three weeks. Pitted, light-colored scars are often present after the scabs fall off.

### **How soon do symptoms appear?**

After being exposed, a person may have no symptoms for up to 19 days with an average incubation period of seven to 19 days.

### **Should an infected person be excluded from work or school?**

An individual with smallpox must be excluded from work or school. A person is considered not contagious about four weeks after the rash appears and when all scabs have fallen off. Clearance to return to school or work will be determined by public health guidance. Contact the Division of Public Health's Office of Infectious Disease Epidemiology at 1-888-295-5156 for more information.

**Office of Infectious Disease Epidemiology**  
**24/7 Emergency Contact Number: 1-888-295-5156**



# Frequently Asked Questions

## **What is the treatment for smallpox?**

There is no specific treatment for smallpox. Some patients require hospital care to receive intravenous fluids; and medicine to control fever and pain and to treat any complications from the virus.

## **What can a person or community do to prevent the spread of smallpox?**

Vaccination is the only prevention for smallpox. For most people, the smallpox vaccine is safe and effective. Smallpox vaccination has not been given routinely to the general public for many years. If the disease re-emerges, vaccinations would be made available to the public. Vaccination within three to four days of exposure offers protection for most individuals.

## **Resources**

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <https://www.cdc.gov/smallpox/index.html>