

What is Smallpox?

Smallpox is a viral disease unique to humans. The last case of smallpox occurred in 1977 in Somalia.

How is the disease transmitted?

Generally, direct and fairly prolonged face-to-face contact is required to spread smallpox from person to person. On rare occasions smallpox has been spread by virus carried in the air in enclosed settings such as buildings, buses, and trains. Person-to-person spread can be through direct contact with infected bodily fluids. It can also be spread through contact with contaminated objects such as bedding or clothing.

If I am exposed to smallpox or have disease do I have to stay home?

If you have been in close contact to someone with smallpox you will receive smallpox vaccine as soon as possible and may be asked to stay home until 14 days after the last known exposure to a case. If you have disease, you will need to stay home or in a healthcare facility until all scabs have fallen off, usually around 21-28 days.

What are the symptoms of Smallpox?

The first symptoms may include high fever, fatigue, and head and backaches. A characteristic rash, most prominent on the face, arms, and legs, follows in 2-3 days. The rash starts with flat red lesions that appear at the same time. The lesions become pus-filled and begin to crust early in the second week. Scabs develop and then separate and fall off after about 3-4 weeks.

How soon do the symptoms appear?

Symptoms usually appear in about 12 days, but onset can range from 7 - 17 days.

How long is someone infectious?

A person can spread smallpox until all scabs have fallen off, usually about 21 – 28 days after rash appears.

What is the treatment for Smallpox?

There is no proven treatment for smallpox. Patients with smallpox can benefit from supportive therapy (intravenous fluids, medicine to control fever or pain, etc.) and antibiotics for any secondary bacterial infections that may occur.

Can I get vaccinated against Smallpox?

Routine vaccination for smallpox ended in 1972, since smallpox no longer naturally occurs in the world. Vaccination against smallpox is not recommended to prevent the disease in the general public and therefore is not available. However, if a person gets exposed to smallpox, there is vaccine available, and if given within 5 days after exposure, the vaccine can lessen the severity of or even prevent illness.

What if I have had the smallpox vaccine?

All persons are at risk for smallpox, even if they had the vaccine earlier in their lifetime.

How does my doctor tell the difference between smallpox and chickenpox?

The lesions that develop with smallpox develop at the same pace and appear identical. Chickenpox lesions develop in successive crops. The smallpox rash is most prominent on the face, arms, and legs, while the chickenpox rash is most prominent on the trunk.