

SMALLPOX

Smallpox is an ancient disease caused by the variola virus. Prior to the introduction of vaccination against smallpox in the 18th century, approximately 50 million cases of the disease occurred in the world each year. The last naturally occurring case of smallpox occurred in Somalia in 1977. In 1980, the World Health Organisation declared that smallpox had been eradicated worldwide, routine childhood immunisation and production of the vaccine was discontinued. However, due to terrorist threats, a new smallpox vaccine is now being produced with the goal of producing 300 million doses in 2002. The vaccine will be held in reserve and will be released only in the case of a confirmed case of smallpox or other unique clinical situation.



HOW IS IT SPREAD?



Smallpox is an acutely contagious viral disease transmitted via droplets in the air and direct contact. It has been found that the virus spreads more rapidly in closed environments via ventilation systems thereby increasing the ability to infect others. The incubation period is 12 -14 days.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

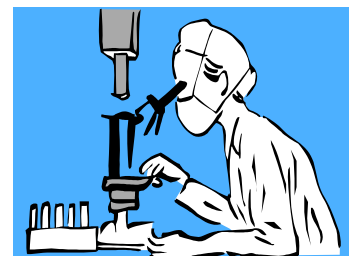


Initial symptoms include high fever, muscle pain, malaise and exhaustion with severe headache and backache. Two to four days later, a rash develops and eventually progresses to pustules and then scabs that leave pitting scars. The rash appears first on the face and forearms, spreads to the trunk and legs, and frequently involves the palms of the hands and feet. Treatment is mainly supportive, with antibiotics used for secondary bacterial infections. The mortality rate is approximately 30%. A person is capable of spreading the disease from when the fever begins until the scabs separate and should therefore be isolated away from others during that time.

PREVENTION



The vaccine is only available through government agencies and will not be available to the general public except under special circumstances. Vaccination with vaccinia virus vaccine is indicated for persons in specific high-risk categories, including highly specialised laboratory and healthcare workers working with smallpox or closely related Orthopox viruses.



SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

This immunisation has not been required for international travel to any country since 1982. Occasionally, an embassy or consulate representative may mistakenly state that smallpox immunisation is an entry requirement, such advice is erroneous. Smallpox vaccination is **not** required for international travellers.