

## **SMALLPOX**

In 1980 the variola virus, also known as Smallpox, was eradicated from the earth. The last known case in the United States occurred in 1949. The last known case, world-wide, appeared in Africa in 1977.

However, two research stocks were maintained, one at the CDC laboratory in Atlanta, Georgia the other in a similar lab in Russia. The Soviet lab began experimenting with smallpox as a biological weapon in 1980. After the fall of the Soviet Union, it was reported by bioterrorism experts, that a smallpox virus stock, had been stolen by a terrorist- sponsored country.

The incubation period averages about 12 days following exposure. Initial symptoms include high fever, fatigue, and head and back aches. A characteristic rash, most prominent on the face, arms, and legs, follows in 2-3 days. The rash starts with flat red lesions that evolve at the same rate. 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. The majority of patients with smallpox recover, but death occurs in up to 30% of cases.

Smallpox is passed from person-to-person by infected saliva droplets. Optimal infectious period occurs during the first seven days of the illness.

The risk is highest in those people born after 1972. In 1972, vaccination programs ceased world-wide as it was assumed that smallpox was no longer a threat. The vaccine for smallpox is not recommended to the general public and is not available at this time.

The smallpox vaccine utilizes a live virus called vaccinia. There is no treatment for smallpox, antibiotics are given to prevent secondary infections.

The government has 15.4 million doses of smallpox vaccine and hopes to buy an additional 300 million. A mass vaccination program will only occur if smallpox becomes a threat.

In the event that smallpox is used as a weapon the US government's plan to vaccinate will be carefully apportioned to family, friends, co-workers, health care workers and other individuals who are in close contact with the infected person. The CDC's emergency plan starts when a physician alerts the state and federal health officials that a patient tested positive for smallpox. The test will then be confirmed at either the CDC lab or a laboratory at Fort Detrick, in Maryland. The patient will be quarantined and treated with IV fluids and antibiotics. Antibiotics will lessen the chances of secondary bacterial infections often associated with viral infections.

The likelihood of smallpox being used as a bioterrorist weapon is very small.

We at the Health Center will be happy to help you.



**Healthfully yours,**

**Dr. Healthberry**

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For questions or comments you can;

*Write "Healthberry" at*  
University Health Center  
100 UH Health Center  
Houston, Texas 77204-3019

E-Mail "[Healthberry](mailto:JMGray2@central.uh.edu)" at [JMGray2@central.uh.edu](mailto:JMGray2@central.uh.edu)  
Fax "Healthberry" at (713)743-5164.