



# District Health Department No. 2

*Northeast Michigan's Community Health Department*

## SMALLPOX

### WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

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#### WHAT IS SMALLPOX?

Smallpox is caused by the Variola virus. Smallpox outbreaks involve either Variola minor or the more serious Variola major.

#### HOW COMMON IS SMALLPOX?

Smallpox was eradicated as a disease in 1977. In 1980, the World Health Organization (WHO) Assembly recommended that all countries cease vaccination and all laboratories destroy their stock of the smallpox virus or transfer them to one of two WHO reference labs. All countries reported compliance. The United States can't verify that the virus is not being held in other places besides the two WHO laboratories. Because of this, the deliberate reintroduction of smallpox is regarded as a definite possibility.

#### WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF SMALLPOX?

Initial symptoms include high fever, fatigue and head and back aches. A rash, most likely on the face, arms and legs, follows in two to three days. The rash starts with flat, red sores that develop at the same rate. The sores become pus-filled and begin to crust early in the second week. Scabs develop and then fall off after about three to four weeks. Most patients with smallpox recover, but it is fatal in to 30% of cases.

#### CAN SMALLPOX BE SPREAD PERSON-TO-PERSON?

Yes, person-to-person spread occurs through respiratory droplets or direct contact, and can only infect those who have direct close (within six feet) exposure to an individual. Smallpox is most contagious during the first week of illness. This is because that is when the largest amount of virus is present in the saliva. However, some of the transmission lasts until the scabs have fallen off. Bedding, clothing, and items in direct contact with an infected individual can harbor the virus and should be sanitized with extremely hot water and a strong disinfectant before use.

#### IS THERE A VACCINE OR A WAY TO PREVENT INFECTION?

Routine vaccination against smallpox ended in 1972. The level of immunity of persons vaccinated before 1972 is uncertain. These people are assumed to be susceptible. Vaccination against smallpox is not recommended to prevent the disease in the general public. In people exposed to smallpox, the vaccine can lessen the severity of or even prevent illness if given within four days after exposure. Vaccine against smallpox contains another live virus called vaccine. The vaccine does not contain smallpox virus.

Smallpox Fact Sheet

RCP-AP-06j

The United States currently has an emergency supply of the vaccine. Should an incident occur, it will only be given to those at high risk of coming into contact with the virus or have been exposed.

For more information on Smallpox, please visit the Center's for Disease Control website at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) or call District Health Department #2 at 1-800-504-2650.

Information taken from the Center's for Disease Control website at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).