

SMALLPOX

Smallpox is an acute, viral illness caused by the Orthopox virus, Variola. It was declared eradicated from the WORLD in 1980.

TRANSMISSION

Both large and small respiratory droplets transmit smallpox. You can breathe in tiny viral particles into your lungs if you have close contact with someone with the disease. You can also get the viral particles into your body if you touch the smallpox skin lesions of a patient, or handle their contaminated linens.

SYMPTOMS

The acute, clinical symptoms are similar to influenza during the first 2-4 days of the illness. Skin lesions appear quickly on the face and extremities (including palms and soles) progression from macules to vesicles. The rash scabs over in 1-2 weeks. It differs from chickenpox in that it appears simultaneously all over the body as opposed to the 'waves' of vesicles like chickenpox.

WHO IS AT RISK?

Smallpox is very contagious and person-to-person transmission is very likely from airborne and droplet exposure and by contact with skin lesions or secretions. Patients are considered most infectious if they are coughing or have a hemorrhagic form of smallpox. Patients with smallpox become contagious at the onset of the rash and remain contagious until the scabs separate in about 3 weeks.

TREATMENT

Since vaccination for smallpox in the United States ceased in 1972, a large percentage of the population can get smallpox. It is unknown whether those adults who were vaccinated prior to 1972 remain immune. After infection of smallpox, antibiotics for secondary infections and supportive therapy are indicated for treatment. No antiviral agents have been effective against the disease.

PREVENTION

In addition to standard precautions, use airborne and contact precautions. Place the patient in a private room that has 1) monitored negative air pressure in relation to the surrounding areas; 2) 6 to 12 air changes per hour; and 3) appropriate discharge of air outdoors or monitored high-efficiency filtration of room air. Limit the movement and transport of the patient from the room to essential purposes only. Wear respiratory (N95 respirator), gowns, and gloves when entering the patient's room.

NOTE: A SINGLE SUSPECTED CASE OF SMALLPOX MUST BE TREATED AS AN INTERNATIONAL HEALTH EMERGENCY AND MUST BE BROUGHT TO THE ATTENTION OF NATIONAL OFFICIALS THROUGH LOCAL AND STATE HEALTH AUTHORITIES.