

## **FACT SHEET: SMALLPOX**

Smallpox is caused by the variola virus.

### **Symptoms:**

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

### **Occurrence:**

Smallpox infection was eliminated from the world in 1977.

### **Transmission:**

Smallpox is spread from one person to another by infected saliva droplets that expose a susceptible person having face-to-face contact with the ill person.

### **Incubation Period:**

The incubation period is about 12 days (range: 7 to 17 days) following exposure.

### **Period of Communicability:**

Persons with smallpox are most infectious during the first week of illness, however, some risk of transmission lasts until all scabs have fallen off.

### **Management:**

Vaccination against smallpox ended in 1972 and is not recommended to prevent disease or for general public use. In people exposed to smallpox, the vaccine can lessen the severity of or even prevent illness if given within 4 days after exposure.

There is no proven treatment for smallpox but research to evaluate new antiviral agents is ongoing. 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 occur.

Any suspected cases of smallpox should be reported to local public health officials immediately.

### **Preventative measures:**

Protective eyewear and masks are indicated if potential contact with respiratory droplets could occur. Gloves should be worn when contact with skin or saliva may occur.