

Bioterrorism Preparedness and Response Smallpox Questions and Answers

What is Smallpox? Smallpox is a viral disease that was eliminated in 1977.

Does the public health department have Smallpox Vaccine? NO. The Federal government has a supply of Smallpox vaccine, which they are holding for use in a bioterrorist event involving Smallpox. The vaccine is otherwise unavailable.

How is Smallpox Transmitted? 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. Smallpox can also be transmitted via infected laundry, bedding, etc.

What are the symptoms of Smallpox? 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. Smallpox is distinct from Chickenpox in that in Smallpox, the rash will develop over the body and extremities at the same time, while in Chickenpox, the rash develops first on the body, and spreads to the extremities.

Can Smallpox be spread from person to person? Yes. Smallpox is highly contagious.

How is Smallpox treated? Vaccination within 7 days of exposure may lessen disease. Otherwise, the use of antiviral medicine may help persons infected.

What is the incubation period of Smallpox? 7-19 days (1-3 weeks)

If you have any further questions, please call the Public Health Department at (805) 781-5500