



Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

Public Health – Muskegon County

Smallpox Fact Sheet

What is smallpox?

Smallpox is a highly contagious disease caused by a virus, which can be fatal. Because there is no known treatment, approximately 30% of people who get smallpox will die.

Fortunately there have been no cases of small pox since 1977. There is a concern, however, that small pox could be used as a weapon of bioterrorism, especially since most people are presently not protected against it.

How is smallpox spread?

Smallpox is very contagious. It is spread through face-to-face contact by coughing or sneezing.

It can also be spread by touching infected bodily fluids, or by touching items such as clothing and bed sheets, which have been in contact with an infected person.

What are the symptoms?

Smallpox symptoms usually do not appear until 1 – 2 ½ weeks after exposure.

Early symptoms may include flu-like symptoms such as:

- Headache
- Body aches
- Fever

A rash appears after 3 – 4 days, which later turns into painful blisters. These blisters scab over and then fall off after about 3 weeks.

How long is a person with smallpox contagious?

People with small pox can be contagious early in the disease when they have the flu-like symptoms mentioned above, but are most contagious when they have a rash.

They remain contagious until all of the scabs have fallen off, which usually occurs in about 3 weeks.

What is the treatment for smallpox?

There is no treatment for smallpox. The only way to prevent smallpox is by vaccination.

How can I get the smallpox vaccine?

Because there are possible side effects from the vaccine it will only be used if it becomes necessary.

In the event of an emergency the government will distribute the vaccine through the local health department.

For more information on smallpox:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC),
www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/smallpox/

CDC Public Information

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|---------|----------------|
| English | 1-888-246-2675 |
| Espanol | 1-888-246-2857 |
| TTY | 1-888-874-2646 |

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