

What is Smallpox?

Smallpox is an infectious disease unique to humans caused by either of two virus variants, *Variola major* or *Variola minor*. Smallpox was eliminated by vaccination and declared eradicated by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1979.

What are the symptoms?

There is sudden onset of high fever, malaise, headache, prostration, severe backache, abdominal pain and vomiting. After 2-4 days the fever begins to fall. The virus localizes in small blood vessels of the skin and in the nose and throat. In the skin this results in a characteristic rash and later, fluid filled blisters. The rash first appears on the face, then the extremities including the palms of the hands and soles of the feet, and then the trunk. Longterm complications include scars (commonly on the face), blindness from corneal ulceration, and limb deformities due to arthritis and osteomyelitis.

How is it spread?

Infection usually occurs via the respiratory tract (droplet) or skin or conjunctiva inoculation.

What is the incubation period?

7-19 days.

How long is it communicable?

It is infectious from the time of development to the disappearance of all scabs, about 3 weeks.

Other Questions?

Talk to your health care provider or call our Communicable Disease Program at 613-966-5500 x349. Toll Free 1-800-267-2803 | TTY Dial 711 (1-800-267-6511) | www.hpepublichealth.ca

Reference

- Heymann, D. L., (2008). *Control of Communicable Diseases Manual*. (19th Ed.). Washington, DC: American Public Health Association.

CD-219

2011/09/09

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