

Your Health

A newsletter dedicated to student health issues at Minnesota State University

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Smallpox--What You Need To Know

Smallpox is a serious disease--killing up to 30% of the people infected with this virus. It was good news that a successful worldwide vaccination program allowed the disease to be declared eradicated in 1980. However, the events of September and October, 2001 have led the U.S. Government to believe that the deliberate release of smallpox is a possibility and that certain precautions need to be taken. This article will attempt to provide you with information about smallpox disease and vaccination.

Smallpox is caused by a virus that is spread from person to person through close contact. The symptoms of smallpox begin with high fever, head and body aches and sometimes vomiting. A rash follows that spreads and progresses to raised bumps and pus-filled blisters that crust, scab, and fall off after about three weeks, leaving a pitted scar. Symptoms begin to appear 7 to 17 days after exposure. A person becomes most contagious with the onset of the rash and is contagious until the last smallpox scab falls off.

Smallpox can be prevented with use of the smallpox vaccine. The vaccine is made from a virus called vaccinia, which is another "pox"-type virus related to smallpox but cannot cause smallpox. The vaccine helps the body develop immunity to smallpox. Unlike other vaccines, smallpox vaccine is not given with a hypodermic needle. It is given with a special two-pronged needle that is dipped into the vaccine solution. The needle is then used to prick the skin a number of times. The pricking is not deep, but it will cause a sore spot and one or two drops of blood to form. The vaccine is usually given in the upper arm.

If the vaccination is successful, a red and itchy bump develops at the immunization site in three or four days. In the first week after vaccination, the bump becomes a large blister, fills with pus, and begins to drain. During the second week, the blister begins to dry up and a scab forms. The scab falls off in the third week, leaving a small scar.

Most people experience mild reactions to the vaccine including a sore arm, fever, and body aches. Some people will experience reactions severe enough to miss work, school, or other activities. In the past, about 1,000 people for every 1 million people vaccinated for the first time experience serious reactions, including a vigorous reaction at the site of the vaccination and spread of the vaccinia virus to other parts of the body and to other people. It is estimated that 1 to 2 people out of every 1 million people vaccinated will die as a result of life-threatening reactions to the vaccine. People most likely to have side effects are people who have, or even once had, skin conditions (especially eczema or atopic dermatitis), and people with weakened immune systems, such as those who have received a transplant, are HIV positive, or are receiving treatment for cancer. Anyone who falls within these categories, or lives with someone who falls into one of these categories, should NOT get the smallpox vaccine unless they are exposed to the disease. For additional information about smallpox vaccine go to: <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/smallpox/vaccination/needtoknow.asp>

Information for this article was obtained from the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services: <http://www.smallpox.gov/QuestionsAnswers.html>



Dry Skin A Problem?



For some, dry skin is a year-round problem. For most, the cold winter air makes skin itchy, dry and uncomfortable. No matter if dry skin is a seasonal or an all-the-time problem for you, the following tips may be helpful:

- *Bathe once daily, or every other day if you're comfortable with the idea
- *Avoid taking long, hot baths or showers. They might feel great but they strip the skin's natural oils.
- *Use a minimal amount of soap only where essential. "Pits & Privates" is the hospital slang for this approach to bathing. Definitely avoid the total body lathering of TV ads!
- *Apply moisturizers immediately after bathing (to lock in moisture) and before bed.
- *Avoid moisturizers that contain alcohol. Look for those labeled "hypoallergenic."
- *Don't forget to protect your lips. Resist the temptation to lick dry lips. Use a lip balm instead
- *Drink plenty of fluids.



Shots, Rings, and Other New Things: New Options in Contraception

If your knowledge of birth control is limited to abstinence, condoms and birth control pills, here's a summary of a few newer methods:

Lunelle: a once-a-month shot of hormones. This method is very much like birth control pills but the hormones are given in an injection instead of a pill. Lunelle has similar effectiveness and side effects to those of birth control pills.

Depo-Provera: this injection of progesterone is given once every three months. If the injections are given on time this method is more than 99% effective.

Evra: the Evra transdermal patch works on the same principle as nicotine patches. Estrogen and progesterone are absorbed into the body through the skin. The user wears a new patch each week for three weeks in a row and no patch for one week.

NuvaRing: this hormone-releasing vaginal ring is similar to other methods of contraception that use the hormones estrogen and progesterone to prevent pregnancy. This one-size-fits-all ring is left in place at the back of the vagina for three weeks and then removed. A new ring is inserted each month.

Emergency Contraception: sometimes called the "morning after pill", this method is a prescribed dose of birth control pills taken within 72 hours of unprotected intercourse. Use of this medication reduces the risk of pregnancy by at least 74%. If a woman is already pregnant, treatment is ineffective.

Costs for all of these methods will vary depending on factors such as where the method is obtained (free clinic, MSU Student Health Services) and prescription insurance coverage.

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