

Smallpox

Agent: Variola virus

Mode of Transmission: Person-to-person transmission through contact with respiratory droplets, airborne particles (rare), and skin lesions of an infected person. Smallpox can also be transmitted through contact with contaminated clothing or bedding.

Signs/Symptoms: Sudden onset of fever, headache, weakness and exhaustion followed by development of a rash that first appears on the face and extremities.

Prevention: Preventive measures include vaccination with the genetically distinct vaccinia virus. Routine vaccination of the American public stopped in 1972. At this time, vaccine is only available to members of emergency response teams and some military personnel.

Other Important Information: The last case of smallpox in the United States was in 1949; the last naturally occurring case in the world was in Somalia in 1977. Smallpox is considered to be one of the agents that could be used for bioterrorism because the disease can be spread from person to person and would cause increased illness and death in the population if used as a weapon.

The last case of smallpox in Virginia occurred in 1944.