



smallpox

information

Smallpox is an acute, contagious, and sometimes fatal disease caused by the variola virus (an orthopoxvirus), and marked by fever and a distinctive progressive skin rash. Smallpox normally spreads from contact with infected persons. Generally, direct and fairly prolonged face-to-face contact is required to spread smallpox from one person to another. Smallpox also can be spread through direct contact with infected bodily fluids or contaminated objects such as bedding or clothing. Indirect spread is less common. Smallpox is not known to be transmitted by insects or animals.

symptoms

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. After exposure, it takes between 7 and 17 days for symptoms of smallpox to appear (average incubation time is 12 to 14 days). During this time, the infected person feels fine and is not contagious.

what to do

In 1980, the disease was declared eradicated following worldwide vaccination programs. Smallpox can be prevented through use of the smallpox vaccine. There is no proven treatment for smallpox, but research to evaluate new antiviral agents is ongoing. Early results from laboratory studies suggest that the drug cidofovir may fight against the smallpox virus. Patients with smallpox can benefit from supportive therapy (e.g., intravenous fluids, medicine to control fever or pain) and antibiotics for any secondary bacterial infections that may occur.