Smallpox

You were seen today because you were concerned you were exposed to smallpox. Smallpox is a disease much like modern day chicken pox, but it is more deadly. It is caused by a virus (the variola virus). Like most viruses, once it causes the disease, it must run its course. The incubation period ranges from 7 to 17 days after exposure. This is the length of time required to get the disease following exposure to the virus. It is this incubation time that is helpful if exposure to the virus occurs. **In people exposed to smallpox, the vaccine can lessen the severity of, or even prevent illness if given within 4 days after exposure.** Vaccine against smallpox contains another live virus called vaccinia. The vaccine does not contain smallpox virus.

Vaccination is not recommended to prevent the disease in the general public unless there has been definite exposure to smallpox.

SYMPTOMS

Initial symptoms include high fever, fatigue, and head and back aches. A characteristic rash on the face, arms, and legs follows in 2-3 days. The rash starts with flat red *lesions* (sores) that grow at the same rate. Lesions become pus-filled. They begin to crust early in the second week. Scabs develop and then separate and fall off after about 3-4 weeks. The majority of patients with smallpox recover. Death occurs in up to 30% of cases.

SPREAD OF SMALLPOX

Smallpox is spread from person to person by infected saliva droplets. Persons with smallpox are most infectious during the first week of illness. This is when the largest amount of virus is present in saliva. However, some risk of transmission lasts until all scabs have fallen off.

There is no proven treatment for smallpox. Research to evaluate new antiviral therapy is ongoing. Patients with smallpox can benefit from supportive therapy. This includes intravenous fluids, medicine to control fever or pain, and *antibiotics* (medications which kill germs) for any secondary *bacterial* (germ) infections that occur.

Contact your caregiver if you have questions or concerns that still worry you.

Most of this information is courtesy of US Government CDC. In times of an emergency, much of this material may not apply when it comes to specialized care and testing. These are guidelines to help you when that care is not available.

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