

Smallpox

Definition:

Smallpox is a serious, contagious, and sometimes fatal disease caused by the variola (var-ee-o-la) virus. Smallpox has been eradicated due to a successful worldwide vaccination program. The last case in the United States was in 1949. The last naturally occurring case in the world was in Somalia in 1977.

Signs and 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. These will crust, scab, and fall off after about three weeks, leaving a pitted scar.

Transmission:

One way to become infected is by having direct and fairly prolonged face-to-face contact with an infected person. It also can be spread through direct contact with infected body fluids or contaminated objects such as bedding or clothing. Rarely, smallpox has been spread by virus carried in the air in enclosed settings such as buildings, buses, and trains. Humans are the only natural hosts. Smallpox is not known to be transmitted by insects or animals.

Diagnosis:

Maine CDC will work with health care provider to assess risk of smallpox. Laboratory testing to confirm or rule out smallpox will be done in conjunction with protocols established by the federal CDC Laboratory Response Network (LRN.)

Role of the School Nurse:

Prevention:

Smallpox can only be prevented through use of the smallpox vaccine. Currently, the smallpox vaccine is not widely available to the general public. However, there is enough smallpox vaccine to vaccinate every person in the United States in the event of a smallpox emergency.

Treatment Recommendations:

There is no proven treatment for smallpox at this time. Intravenous fluids or antibiotics would possibly be used for supportive therapy or to prevent bacterial infections.

Exclusions:

A student or staff member suspected of having smallpox would be excluded from school and social activities from the onset of rash until all the scabs have dried and fallen off.

Reporting Requirements

A case of smallpox would represent possible bioterrorism and would be immediately reportable by phone to Maine CDC at 1-800-821-5821.

Resources:

More information about smallpox is available at <https://www.cdc.gov/smallpox/>