



VACCINIA AND SMALLPOX

This information will help you understand what happens if your child is exposed to vaccinia or to smallpox. It will also describe the difference between vaccinia and smallpox, and their treatment. Feel free to ask a doctor or nurse to go over any information you do not understand.

WHAT IS VACCINIA?

Vaccinia is the name of the virus used in the smallpox vaccine. The smallpox vaccine does not contain the smallpox virus and cannot cause smallpox. A person can get vaccinia by touching a vaccination site before it has healed or by touching bandages and clothing containing the live virus from the vaccination site. Vaccinia is not spread by air or being around a person who has been vaccinated as long as there is no direct contact with the vaccination site.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF VACCINIA?

A person with vaccinia may have a rash, fever, and head and body aches. A vaccinia rash could show up in the eyes, on the face, arms, etc.—anywhere your child may have touched or scratched after touching the vaccination site or bandages containing the live virus.

HOW CAN I PROTECT MY CHILD FROM VACCINIA?

Your child is at greatest risk if a member of your household has received the smallpox vaccine. It is important that person follow instructions given to them to prevent the spread of vaccinia.

In addition:

- If you come in contact with the vaccination site or any materials that may contain the live virus from the site (bandages, towels, clothing, washcloths, etc.), immediately wash with soap and warm water.
- Keep a separate laundry hamper for clothing, towels, bedding, etc. that have come in contact with the vaccination site. Wash these items with warm water, detergent and/or bleach. Wash hands carefully afterward.
- Remind the person who has been vaccinated to follow site care and hand washing instructions.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I THINK MY CHILD HAS VACCINIA?

Call your child's pediatrician or family doctor for advice. He or she can discuss the symptoms to determine the best thing to do. Vaccinia would be treated like any other rash—your child's doctor would want to rule out other causes of rashes before prescribing treatment and may also refer your child to the emergency department or urgent care center. Most of the time, a child with vaccinia would not need to be hospitalized.

IS VACCINIA CONTAGIOUS?

At this time we are assuming vaccinia would not be contagious unless there was direct contact with the vaccination site. It is not an airborne virus. You cannot catch vaccinia from being in the room with a person who has vaccinia.

WHAT IS SMALLPOX?

Smallpox is a severe, contagious and sometimes fatal disease. Most people infected with smallpox recover, although some may have permanent scars. In some cases, blindness could occur.

HOW IS SMALLPOX SPREAD?

Smallpox is spread from contact with infected persons. Usually direct face-to-face contact is necessary to spread smallpox from one person to another. Smallpox can also be spread through direct contact with infected body fluids or contaminated objects such as bedding or clothing. In a few cases, smallpox transmission was airborne. Smallpox is not known to be spread by insects or animals.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF SMALLPOX?

Symptoms begin with a high fever, head and body aches, and sometimes vomiting. A rash follows and spreads then progresses to raised bumps and pus-filled blisters that crust scab and fall off after three weeks.

HOW IS SMALLPOX TREATED?

There is no proven treatment for smallpox. If the smallpox vaccine is given within three to four days of exposure, it may prevent infection or significantly reduce the severity of the infection. Patients with smallpox would be treated with intravenous fluids, medicine to control fever and/or pain, and antibiotics for any secondary infections.

SHOULD MY CHILD BE VACCINATED FOR SMALLPOX?

The smallpox vaccine is not recommended for children under 18 years of age. At this time, the vaccine is available only to health care workers and active duty military. The federal government will make the vaccine available to all adults at a later date.

IF I WAS VACCINATED BEFORE, AM I PROTECTED?

Experts believe previous vaccinations protected the individual for just three to five years.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I THINK MY CHILD HAS SMALLPOX?

A child (or an adult) with smallpox represents a serious community health issue. You and your child's doctor would work with other community agencies to determine the best course of action for treating your child and protecting others in the community.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION ABOUT VACCINIA AND/OR SMALLPOX?

- Talk to your child's pediatrician or family doctor.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention regularly updates its smallpox/vaccinia information. Go to: www.cdc.gov
- The Ohio Hospital Association has frequently asked questions and other resources. Go to: www.ohanet.org
- The American Academy of Pediatrics site contains its position statement on children not receiving the smallpox vaccine. Go to: www.aap.org/advocacy/washing/smallpoxvaccine.htm

The information in this handout is for general information only and should not be considered complete. For more information about vaccinia and/or smallpox, please ask your doctor.

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