Name \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Teacher\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Date \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Smallpox

You may have heard about smallpox and wondered what it is or whether you or anyone you know could get it. Some people are worried that the [germ](http://kidshealth.org/kid/talk/qa/germs.html) that causes smallpox could be spread and used as a weapon. Although this is a frightening thought, the government and police are working on ways to protect us.

In the meantime, it's important not to panic over smallpox — the chance that you or someone in your family could ever get it is very small. One of the ways you can feel better is to learn about the disease. When you know what it is and how you can get it, it doesn't seem quite as scary.

So here are answers to some questions you might have about smallpox:

* **What is smallpox?**  
  Smallpox is a very serious illness caused by a virus called the **variola** (say: vair-ee-**oh**-luh) **virus**. Smallpox gets its name from the pus-filled blisters (or pocks) that form during the illness. Although the names may sound alike, smallpox is not related to [chickenpox](http://kidshealth.org/kid/ill_injure/sick/chicken_pox.html), which is a milder disease caused by a different virus.  
    
  Although people are concerned that the smallpox virus might be used as a weapon, this would be difficult for anyone to do. Right now, there are **no** cases of smallpox disease in the United States. In fact, the last case of smallpox in the United States was in 1949, and the last case in the world was in 1977. Some samples of the virus that causes the disease are still kept in laboratories, though.
* **How is smallpox spread?**  
  Smallpox is contagious. That means the virus can spread to others. It spreads through tiny drops of an infected person's saliva ([spit](http://kidshealth.org/kid/talk/yucky/spit.html)) when the person coughs, talks, or sneezes. Smallpox usually passes from person to person during close, face-to-face contact.
* **How is it diagnosed?**  
  If someone does get smallpox, a doctor can recognize the disease because it causes a special kind of [rash](http://kidshealth.org/kid/ill_injure/aches/rashes.html). The rash shows up as blisters on the skin that fill with fluid and crust over. This might sound like chickenpox, but the blisters look different from the blisters that chickenpox causes. The other symptoms of smallpox are like those of many other less serious illnesses: [fever](http://kidshealth.org/kid/ill_injure/sick/fever.html), [headache](http://kidshealth.org/kid/ill_injure/sick/headache.html), backache, and feeling tired.
* **What is the smallpox vaccine?**  
  A **vaccine** (say: vak-**seen**), a type of [shot](http://kidshealth.org/kid/stay_healthy/body/guide_shots.html), can prevent infection with the virus that causes smallpox. Years ago, people were vaccinated against smallpox. Today, smallpox vaccines aren't given because nobody has had the disease for many years.  
    
  Although you can't — and don't need to — get a smallpox vaccine right now, there is a supply of the vaccine in case there's an outbreak of the disease. Scientists also are working to make more vaccine to have on hand for the future.
* **Are there medicines to take for smallpox?**  
  There are no pills that can treat smallpox, but scientists are doing research to try to develop medicine for the disease. If someone does become infected with the smallpox virus, getting the vaccine within a few days of becoming infected can lessen the disease's symptoms.

If you still feel scared when you hear about smallpox, remember that it's very unlikely that you, your family, or anyone you know will ever come in contact with the virus that causes it. Talking to your teacher or parent may make you feel better and give you answers to any other questions you may have.

Reading – Grade 5

Why is it not necessary for people to get a smallpox vaccine anymore? Give three ways that smallpox can be spread. Use details from the passage to support your answer.

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