

# ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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## *NEWS RELEASE*

Residents should take protective actions because of smallpox outbreak

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Alabama Department of Public Health has been advised that a smallpox outbreak has occurred in \_\_\_\_\_ (list affected areas). Residents of \_\_\_\_\_ (list affected areas) are encouraged to take protective action to prevent exposure, seek medical attention to prevent exposure, and seek medical attention if they have been exposed.

Smallpox, whose scientific name is Variola major, is a virus from the Orthopoxvirus family. It is a naturally occurring disease that was officially eradicated in the 1980s, but has recently become a potential bioterrorism threat.

People can become exposed to smallpox by:

- Prolonged face-to-face contact with someone who has the virus and is ill with fever and a rash of round lesions. (Typically, people with smallpox are not contagious until lesions start appearing and they are obviously ill.)
- Direct contact with infected bodily fluids or an object such as bedding or clothing that has the virus on it.
- The virus can also be used as a weapon and disseminated into the air as a fine spray or powder that could affect large numbers of people.

“We want people who are in the affected areas to take this threat seriously and take precautions to limit exposure to themselves and others,” said \_\_\_\_\_ (Public Health spokesperson). “We also want those who have been exposed to take measures to prevent serious harm and to seek medical attention immediately if they have symptoms.”

For the first 7 to 17 days after exposure, infected persons may feel fine and not be contagious. After the incubation period (7 to 17 days) the first symptoms begin to appear. The initial symptoms include fever, fatigue, head and body aches, and sometimes

vomiting. The fever is usually high, in the range of 101 to 104 degrees Fahrenheit. This stage may last for 2 to 4 days.

Two to three days after the onset of symptoms, a rash appears first as small red spots on the tongue and in the mouth. A rash then appears on the skin, starting on the face and spreading to the arms and legs and then to the hands and feet. Usually the rash spreads to all parts of the body within 24 hours.

There is no proven cure for smallpox, so there is very little that physicians can do except provide supportive care. Patients with smallpox may be helped by intravenous fluids, medicine to control fever or pain, and antibiotics for any secondary bacterial infections that may occur.

One of the best ways to prevent smallpox is through vaccination. If given to a person before exposure to smallpox, the vaccine can completely protect them. Vaccination within three days after exposure will prevent or lessen the severity of smallpox in most people. Vaccination 4 to 7 days after exposure likely offers some protection from disease or may decrease the severity of disease. Vaccination will not protect smallpox patients who already have a rash.

The department has scheduled a point of dispensing site at \_\_\_\_\_ (location – city) from \_\_\_\_\_ (time) to dispense \_\_\_\_\_ (medication). The \_\_\_\_\_ (medication) will be designated for the following priority groups:

- Priority group
- Priority group
- Priority group

Stay tuned to your local radio or television stations for more information, developments or changes in the situation. For more information on biological agents, please visit [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).