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Smallpox and Smallpox Vaccine Fact Sheet

What is smallpox *DISEASE* and what is the risk to my animals?

Smallpox is a serious disease that kills up to 30% of people infected with it. It is caused by the **variola** virus, which is spread from person to person through close contact. Smallpox can also cause a high fever, severe rash and blindness. The world's last case of naturally acquired smallpox was in 1977. **Smallpox does not affect animals.**

What is smallpox *VACCINE*?

Smallpox vaccine is made from a virus related to smallpox. The vaccine contains live **vaccinia** virus (not smallpox variola virus or cowpox virus). Passing the vaccine virus between people has been reported when the proper care of the vaccination site was not done (see next point below). This person-to-person transmission can happen up to three weeks after vaccination (until the scab at the vaccination site falls off).

What can you do to decrease the risk to your animals if you or a family member is vaccinated for smallpox?

There have been no reported cases of accidental human-to-animal vaccinia virus (vaccine) infection.

Routine vaccination site care will further decrease the chance of an accidental vaccine virus infection to your pet or livestock.

- Wash hands with soap and water after touching the vaccination site or bandage materials.
- Do not let animals sniff or have any direct contact with your vaccination site.
- Do not let animals have any contact with the bandages, clothing, towels, sheets, etc., that have touched the vaccination site or the scab.
- Keep pets out of the room when you are changing bandages, clothes, towels, or sheets.
- Before allowing your pet back into the room after you have changed your bandage, handle and dispose of all contaminated materials safely:
 - Place used bandages and gauze in a plastic zipper bag before throwing them away. You should do the same with your scab when it falls off.
 - Cover trash containers tightly, and take them to an area that is inaccessible to pets and rodents.
 - Use normal laundering (hot water with bleach and detergent) to wash clothing, towels or sheets that have touched the vaccination site.
- Wash your hands after touching the vaccination site or bandage materials and before touching anything else, including your eyes, skin, or animals.
- People who care for livestock should wear long-sleeved clothing and wash their hands before milking or having contact with the animals.

The above precautions will also help protect family members. If your pet's skin or hair coat comes in contact with vaccine virus, other members of the household can be exposed through handling the animal.

Where can you get further information?

- Contact your veterinarian with questions on smallpox, and smallpox vaccine as it relates to your animals.
- The Centers of Disease Control & Prevention has much information on smallpox, and smallpox vaccine, and can be found here: <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/smallpox/index.asp>
- Contact your local or state health department for human related smallpox questions and information.

References:

- Bill Johnston, DVM, DACVPM, State Public Health Veterinarian, Alabama Department of Public Health, P.O. Box 303017, Montgomery, AL 36130-3017
- Centers of Disease Control and Prevention, *Smallpox Pre-Vaccination Information Packet*
- Washington Department of Health materials were adapted for *Question Three*