FACT SHEET – Smallpox

SMALLPOX IS A DISEASE

• A virus causes it.
• Only humans can get smallpox.
• Smallpox no longer occurs naturally in the world.
  – In 1980, it was eliminated from the world by vaccination.
  – If it occurs again, it would be because laboratory samples were deliberately spread.
• Smallpox and chickenpox are different.
  – Smallpox starts with a high fever.
  – Smallpox makes many sores on the palms of hands and soles of feet.
  – A doctor can easily tell the difference.

SMALLPOX IS KNOWN BY THE RASH IT CAUSES

• About two weeks after getting the virus, a person gets a high fever and feels very sick.
• Two to three days after the fever starts
  – small, colored bumps appear in the throat
  – rash spreads to the chest, back, and legs
• The rash changes over the next two weeks as
  – bumps become round, hard blisters
  – pimples scab over
  – scabs fall off
• Smallpox spreads mostly from person to person.
  – People can only spread the disease when she/he has the rash.
  – Usually, it requires close personal contact for hours to pass the disease.
  – Once the scabs fall off the pox, a person can no longer spread the disease.
• The smallpox virus is easily killed outside the body.
  – It will die if exposed to sunlight for a short time.
  – Most household cleaners (bleach) will kill it.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services Frankfort, KY
http://chfs.ky.gov/dph/preparedness
Kentucky Regional Poison Center Louisville, KY
EMERGENCY: 1-800-222-1222
http://www.krpc.com
Lake Cumberland District Health Dept. (606) 678 – 4761
The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Atlanta, GA
Toll free: 1-800-311-3435
http://www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/smallpox
FACT SHEET – Smallpox (continued)

THE DISEASE AND ITS SPREAD CAN BE PREVENTED

- There is a vaccine that protects people.
  - It prevents or lessens the disease if given up to four days after exposure.
  - If smallpox occurs again, people vaccinated years ago should be vaccinated again.
  - There is vaccine for everyone in the United States.

- Once symptoms start
  - There is no cure
  - For every three people who get sick with smallpox, about one will die from it
  - People are treated for the symptoms they have (“supportive care”)

- Vaccination, isolation, and quarantine prevent the spread of smallpox.
  - People exposed to the virus are vaccinated.
  - People who have the disease are “isolated” from those who don’t in hospital rooms or other places that keep germs from spreading.
  - People who might have the disease but are not showing it yet are “quarantined.”
    - They are kept from coming in close contact with other people.
    - This might be done at a hospital or at home.