



## A History of Smallpox Disease: It's Symptoms, Causes and Prevention Methods

**Bernard Kim\***

Department of Public Health, Yonsei University, Seoul, The Republic of Korea

\*Corresponding Author: Bernard Kim, Department of Public Health, Yonsei University, Seoul, The Republic of Korea; E-mail: kimbernard9056@edu.kr

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### Description

Smallpox, a viral disease caused by the variola virus, has left an indelible mark on human history. Across centuries, it wielded its devastating impact, causing widespread mortality and leaving survivors with severe physical and emotional scars. However, through the convergence of medical advancements, global cooperation, and the resilience of humanity, smallpox stands as the first and only human disease to have been eradicated through a deliberate and concerted effort.

The earliest traces of smallpox date back millennia, with evidence of the disease found in Egyptian mummies from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE. It travelled the ancient trade routes, inflicting devastating epidemics and leaving societies in turmoil. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, smallpox was responsible for an estimated 400,000 deaths annually in Europe alone.

Smallpox manifested with flu-like symptoms initially, followed by a rash that evolved into raised, fluid-filled blisters across the body. These lesions often resulted in disfigurement and, in severe cases, blindness or death. Smallpox outbreaks had profound societal consequences, causing economic instability, disrupting trade, and leaving communities decimated in their wake.

Despite vaccination advancements, smallpox remained endemic in many parts of the world, prompting the World Health Organization (WHO) to initiate an ambitious global eradication campaign in 1959.

This endeavor relied on a two-pronged approach: mass vaccination campaigns and intensive surveillance to identify and contain outbreaks.

The eradication effort encountered multifaceted challenges, including vaccine shortages, logistical hurdles in reaching remote populations, and socio-political barriers in conflict zones. Yet, through collaborative efforts involving governments, health workers, and volunteers worldwide, progress was made.

One pivotal moment was the successful containment of a smallpox outbreak in Bangladesh in 1974. This achievement demonstrated the effectiveness of surveillance and containment strategies, showcasing the feasibility of eradicating the disease globally.

After years of relentless effort, meticulous surveillance, and widespread vaccination campaigns, the WHO declared the global eradication of smallpox in 1980. It marked an unparalleled triumph in public health history, signifying humanity's ability to conquer a formidable adversary through science and collective action.

The eradication of smallpox stands as a testament to the power of collaboration, innovation, and determination in public health. It provided a blueprint for future disease eradication programs and underscored the importance of global solidarity in confronting health challenges.

The success of the smallpox eradication campaign also highlighted the critical role of vaccines in preventing infectious diseases. It emphasized the need for continued research, investment, and equitable access to vaccines to safeguard against emerging threats and protect vulnerable populations worldwide.

Following the eradication of smallpox, efforts focused on ensuring the safe handling and storage of remaining virus samples in laboratories to prevent accidental release or deliberate misuse. These measures aimed to maintain vigilance against any potential resurgence of the disease.

The eradication of smallpox remains a pivotal achievement in the history of medicine, demonstrating the power of scientific innovation and global collaboration in overcoming a once-deadly scourge. While the specter of infectious diseases persists, the legacy of the smallpox eradication campaign serves as a beacon of hope, inspiring future generations to confront health challenges with unwavering determination and solidarity.

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