

**SMALLPOX FACT SHEET****Someone You Are Close to Is Getting the Vaccine:  
What You Should Know and Do**

If someone you have close, physical contact with (your spouse or partner or other adult family member) is getting the smallpox vaccine, there are some things you should know.

**What You Should Know:**

The smallpox vaccine contains a live virus called vaccinia, which is related to smallpox, though milder. The vaccine helps the body develop immunity to smallpox. And while the smallpox vaccine is safe and effective for most people who receive it, the fact that the virus is live creates special concerns.

The main concern for people who have close, physical contact with someone who has gotten the vaccine is that the vaccinia virus can be spread from the vaccination site, causing rash (mild to severe), fever, and head and body aches. Vaccinia is spread by touching a vaccination site before it has healed or by touching bandages, clothing, or other material contaminated with live virus from the vaccination site and then touching another part of the body or touching someone else. The vaccination site often becomes itchy, which may lead to scratching, rubbing, or touching the site. In the past, when vaccinated persons spread vaccinia to other parts of their body, it often was to their eyes or their genitals. Vaccinated persons also can spread vaccinia to other individuals. In the past, this was reported to occur between 20 and 60 times out of 1 million primary vaccinees and often involved children. Most of the time, this took place in situations of close contact, such as happens in a household, or in similar situations involving close physical contact where careful hand hygiene and site care may not be followed.

People getting the vaccine will receive instructions for special care to minimize the risk of spreading vaccinia by touch, but you also can take precautions to protect yourself. These precautions should be followed until the scab that forms on the vaccine after vaccination falls off on its own (in 2 to 3 weeks).

**What You Should Do:**

- Do not touch the vaccine site or any materials that might be contaminated with live virus from the site (such as bandages, towels, clothing, or washcloths used by the person who got the vaccine).
- If you accidentally come in contact with the vaccine site, or something that may be contaminated with live virus, immediately wash with soap and warm water.
- If you share a bed with the vaccinated person, be sure that they are wearing a gauze bandage held in place with first aid adhesive tape over the vaccination site. As an extra precaution, the person who got the vaccine can wear a shirt or pajamas that cover the bandaged vaccine site. If they do not, you may choose to sleep in a separate bed. (When involved in direct patient care, healthcare workers should cover the gauze with a semipermeable dressing as an additional barrier.)
- Keep a separate laundry hamper for items like clothing, towels, or bedding that have come in direct contact with the vaccine site or drainage from the site. Launder these items, using warm water with detergent and/or bleach and wash hands carefully afterwards.
- Remind the person who got the vaccine to follow site care and hand washing instructions. If their hand is contaminated and they touch you, you can contract vaccinia.

For more information, visit [www.cdc.gov/smallpox](http://www.cdc.gov/smallpox), or call the CDC public response hotline at (888) 246-2675 (English), (888) 246-2857 (Español), or (866) 874-2646 (TTY)

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