



## SMALLPOX POLICY

### *The Public Health Association of Australia notes:*

1. The World Health Assembly declared the world free of smallpox on 8 May 1980 following the success of the Global Program to Eradicate Smallpox.
2. However, the smallpox virus remains a possible public health problem through incidental and deliberate dissemination. Smallpox virus and related materials (whitepox virus, viral genomic deoxyribonucleic acid - DNA, and other infectious material) are held knowingly in two laboratories, in Moscow (Koltsovo) and Atlanta for research, and may unknowingly be held in natural reservoirs and human entities (Hughes and Gerberding, 2002; World Health Organisation - WHO, 2003).
3. In 2001, the deliberate dissemination of anthrax in the US, through contaminated letters, resulting in public exposure and fatality, and advances in biotechnology and accessibility of related information makes the threat of any country or ill-minded group intending to develop smallpox virus as a biological weapon a realistic possibility (Center for Disease Control - CDC, 2002, WHO, 2001).
4. Search and containment or identifying persons with smallpox, those people who have been in contact with them, and vaccinating them is the best known treatment, should it occur. However, mass vaccination has proven to be inefficient due to the risks outweighing the benefits in non-incidence situations (CDC, 2003).
5. The World Health Assembly approved a new set of International Health Regulations to manage public health emergencies of international concern in May 2005. The new rules will "prevent, protect against, control and provide a public health response to the international spread of disease." In reporting diseases and events under the updated Regulations, member states must report outbreaks of four diseases as public-health emergencies of international concern: Smallpox, Polio (wild type), new strains of human influenza; and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). (International Health Regulations, 2005)
6. The 61st World Health Assembly held in May 2008 confirmed the target date for the destruction of the two stocks of smallpox viruses (in Moscow and Atlanta) in

2010. Australia supported the 2008 World Health Association Resolution.  
(International Health Regulation News, June 2008)

***The Public Health Association of Australia believes:***

5. Preparedness for incidental or smallpox virus incidence can be enhanced most effectively by strengthening public health infrastructure, particularly surveillance and response capacities, which are keys to an effective response to any disease outbreak.

***The Public Health Association of Australia calls on:***

6. The Australian Government to update its current policies in the light of:
  - a) progress being achieved in the application of the 2005 International Health Regulations;
  - b) progress in the development and in-vitro testing of new antiretroviral drugs;
  - c) the development of diagnostic tests and a new - less harmful - vaccine; and
  - d) the maintenance of a global stock of smallpox vaccine.and
7. The World Health Organisation and all governments to collaborate in surveillance and the dissemination system of vaccination in the incidence of smallpox.

***The Public Health Association resolves:***

8. To act in concert with other interested bodies, such as Australian Society of Infectious Diseases' (ASID) Bioterrorism Response Advisory Group, in smallpox surveillance and some aspects of preparedness.

***References:***

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**ADOPTED 1995, REVIEWED AND RE-ENDORSED IN 2005 AND 2008**

*First adopted at the 1995 Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Public Health Association of Australia and revised at the 2005 AGM. The latest review was carried out in July 2008 by the International Health Special Interest Group and the policy was re-endorsed at the 2008 AGM.*