

### **Background – The Smallpox Vaccine**

The smallpox vaccine does not contain smallpox virus, but it does contain a related virus called vaccinia. The skin at the site where the vaccine was administered (including the scab) has live vaccinia virus on it. The virus can be accidentally transmitted to other people and to other parts of the vaccinated person's body by contact with the vaccination site. Until the site completely heals and the scab falls off, vaccinated persons should take precautions to avoid infecting themselves and others by keeping the site bandaged and covered with clothing at all times, including during sleep. For more information, see the following CDC website:

<https://www.cdc.gov/smallpox/transmission/index.html>.

Although the risk is low, certain pets and other animal species are susceptible to vaccinia and may become infected if they come into contact with the virus. The best way to avoid a problem is to protect pets and livestock from any possible contact with the vaccinia virus by taking a few precautions while one's vaccination site heals.

### **Protecting Pets and Other Animals**

Until the vaccination site heals completely:

- Do not let animals sniff or have any direct contact with the vaccination site or the bandages, clothing, sheets, towels, etc. that touch the scab.
- Keep pets out of the room when a vaccinated person is changing bandages or changing clothes.
- Before allowing your pet back into the room after a bandage has been changed, dispose of the bandage in a sealed plastic bag, put any clothing that had contact with the vaccination site in the laundry and **wash your hands well**. The plastic bag containing the used bandage can be disposed of in the trash. Use normal laundering practices (hot water, bleach, and detergent) to wash clothing, bed linens, or towels that have touched the vaccination site, but launder these items separately.
- Make sure that pets and rodents do not have access to trash containers that have contaminated bandages in them. Cover trash containers tightly, and take them to an area that is inaccessible to animals.
- Make sure that the vaccination site is bandaged and that one's hands are washed before handling pocket pets such as guinea pigs, hamsters and other rodents. Do not allow them to have access to the skin area around the bandage.
- Persons who come into contact with livestock should make sure that their vaccination site is covered with a bandage and with clothing, and should wash their hands thoroughly before caring for any animals. Cattle in particular are susceptible to vaccinia infections, so covering the site and good handwashing are especially important before milking dairy cows.

If your animal has any unusual symptoms such as lesions on the skin or mucous membranes, and it could have been exposed to vaccinia virus accidentally, call the health department and your veterinarian.