

Smallpox is an infectious disease caused by the variola virus. It is characterized by fever, a general feeling of ill health (malaise), headaches and back pain. These initial symptoms are followed by a rash and small, raised bumps or lesions (pocks) within two or three days.

Smallpox was a highly contagious disease, but was declared eradicated in 1980. However, recently smallpox has become of interest because of the possibility of its use as a weapon of warfare or of terrorism. There were two strains of smallpox, variola major and variola minor.