

# Smallpox virus eradication

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Smallpox is the only human disease to have been eradicated so far. It was a viral disease caused by the variola virus.



It led to mouth ulcers and skin blisters.



Source: Center for Disease Control and Prevention

The death rate from the virus was about 30% and between 300 and 500 million people died of it in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Those who survived were left with scars over their body and face and were often blinded.

Edward Jenner created a vaccine to smallpox in 1796, having seen that milkmaids who contracted compox were then immune to smallpox.



The World Health Organization (WHO) launched a smallpox eradication programme in 1959 and with international efforts of mass inoculation, smallpox was declared eradicated in 1980.

However, research for effective vaccines for smallpox continues in case it is ever used as a bioterror weapon. Samples of the virus are kept for research in secure labs.

1. Do you think the decision to eradicate smallpox was the right thing to do?
2. Do you think all human diseases should be eradicated if medically possible in future? Or should only the ones that kill be eradicated?