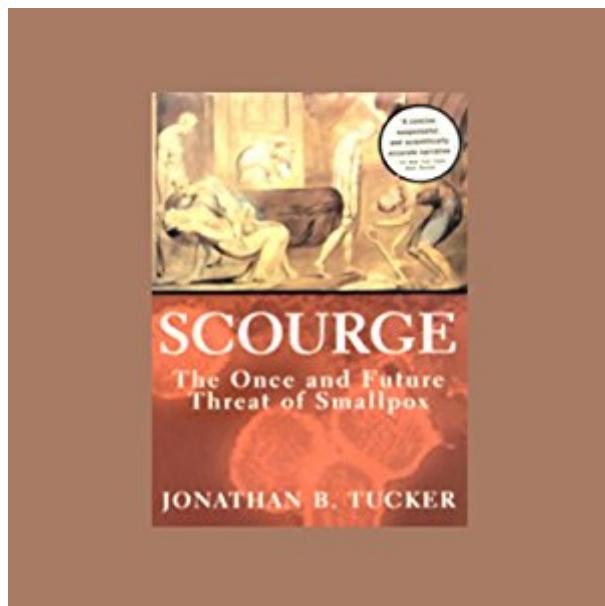


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Scourge: The Once And Future Threat Of Smallpox



Synopsis

[Read by Patrick Cullen] Smallpox, the only infectious disease to have been eradicated, was one of the most terrifying of human scourges. It covered the skin with hideous, painful boils, killed a third of its victims, and left the survivors disfigured for life. In this riveting, often terrifying look at the history of smallpox, Jonathan B. Tucker tells the story of this deadly disease, the heroic efforts to eradicate it worldwide, and the looming dangers it still poses today. Beginning in the sixteenth century, smallpox afflicted rich and poor alike, repeatedly altering the course of human history. No vaccine existed until 1796, and even then it remained a major cause of death in the developing world. Finally, in 1967, the World Health Organization launched an intensified global campaign to eradicate smallpox worldwide. But when it had succeeded, Soviet leaders cynically exploited the world's new vulnerability to smallpox by mass-producing the virus as a strategic weapon. In recent years, concern over the possible return of smallpox has taken an even greater urgency with the realization that clandestine stocks of the virus may still exist. --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

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Customer Reviews

Do you remember Dr. Strangelove? Remember how we all laughed at "Of course, the whole point of a Doomsday Machine is lost, if you *keep* it a *secret*!" Smallpox is Doomsday and that is what the Soviets intended. They started developing the weapon shortly after we announced we would no longer vaccinate our people for Smallpox. It was intended as the Doomsday blow to the handful of Americans who would survive an all out nuclear exchange. After the fall of the Soviet Union Smallpox became a nightmare for the American President. A few short months before 9/11 a computer exercise called Operation Dark Winter studied the effects of the release of Smallpox in a

couple of locations. Within 28 days 3 million Americans would have contracted the disease and 1 million would have died. Smallpox was fully capable of taking down our entire medical society. Recently we completed the stockpile of enough vaccine for every American and developed a vaccination for the immune compromised. The centers to treat infectious diseases that we used in the Ebola outbreak were designed to contain something far worse - Smallpox. By being prepared to protect our own, we protect the even more vulnerable in the third world. Mr. Tucker accurately records the history of Smallpox, the negotiations, the eradication, and sadly the betrayal that is the story of Smallpox and just like Pandora's box a tiny ray of hope.

The author, Jonathan Tucker is an expert on biological and chemical weapons. He studied biology at Yale University, received his Ph.D. in political science from MIT, and served in the State Department, the Congressional Office of Technology Assessment, and the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. So, although his descriptions of past epidemics are horrible enough, it's the present and future threat of smallpox---the second half of this book---where Tucker really scared the bejabbers out of me. I had no idea that the Soviet bioweapons program, Vector, had gone as far as it did in developing viral weapons. According to the author, "Some 4,500 people, including about 250 Ph.D.-level scientists, worked at Vector in the late 1980s...One goal of the...program was to develop a smallpox-based biological weapon containing virulence genes from Ebola hemorrhagic fever virus. At least theoretically, such a viral chimera would combine the hardiness and transmissibility of smallpox with the lethality of Ebola, which was between 90 percent and 100 percent fatal, resulting in an 'absolute' biological weapon." The real irony of the Vector bioweapons program was that the Soviet Union (along with the United States) was a major factor in eradicating the scourge of smallpox from the world in the 1970s. Where are those 4,500 people who worked at Vector, now? Where is the twenty tons of smallpox virus formulation that was stocked at the Center of Virology in Zagorsk? The Soviets supposedly destroyed the stockpile in the late 1980s, but the smallpox seed cultures and the expertise to manufacture biological weapons from them still remain. The author clearly presents the arguments for and against retaining the known remaining smallpox virus stocks in Atlanta and Moscow. However, I believe he sides with the 'destructionists' rather than the 'retentionists': "From a practical standpoint, now that the DNA sequences of representative strains of variola virus had been determined, the live virus was no longer needed to identify smallpox if it were to reappear in the future. Nor would live variola [smallpox] virus be required to protect against a future outbreak of smallpox, since the small pox vaccine--based on the distinct vaccinia virus--could be retained and stockpiled for insurance purposes." The long, difficult

task of eliminating smallpox from the world (as thrillingly described in "Scourge") will not be complete until all known and rogue virus stocks (believed held by North Korea, Iran, Iraq, and possibly China) are destroyed. The world's population has grown increasingly vulnerable to the disease since the last official vaccination programs were eliminated in 1984, as the protective immunity induced by the vaccine lasts only about seven to ten years. Nor is there an effective medical treatment for smallpox. As Tucker states in his closing sentence: "Until humanity's legal and moral restraints catch up with its scientific and technological achievements, the eradication of smallpox will remain as much a cautionary tale as an inspirational one."

This book was written from extensive interviews with Dr. Henderson, the CDC and Johns Hopkins public health physician who headed up the program to eradicate smallpox from the world, believed to be successful as of 1980. So the stories from that fight to rid the world of smallpox are fascinating and authoritative. The story continues through Henderson's effort to get rid of the last government storage freezers of the virus -- and his failure, because of what the government knew and he didn't: the Russians had been growing tons of smallpox for years and loading them in ICBMs aimed at the U.S. It was a terrific betrayal. Big, big question facing us today: When the Russians dismantled their biowarfare program, did anyone get some leftovers? So now the entire world, completely unvaccinated, is vulnerable to this terrible disease, just as the Aztecs were when a handful of armored Spanish soldiers (and one slave with smallpox) destroyed their entire civilization. In the wargames played with biowarfare using smallpox attacks on American cities, the outcome was not favorable. And at the end, players were using ancient techniques because the vaccine had quickly run out: arm-to-arm vaccination, variolation, the goal at that point just being to save as many people as possible. This book tells how to do those easy and old techniques. History, descriptions, facts, transmittal, symptoms, all you need to know about smallpox should there actually be some out there after all. It is to be hoped that no one will never actually need any of the information in this book. If not, the historical record of the eradication of the disease makes vivid reading in itself.

Great, informative book. Bought a new copy, which is beautiful.

This is an extraordinary and timely book. Published this year before the 11 Sept. calamities, it deals with the history of smallpox, the development of immunization, the slow and heroic elimination of smallpox, the secret and evil experiments in the Soviet Union with smallpox virus as a biological weapon in the 1980s and after, and then with the implications of terrorist induced reintroduction of

smallpox. The author shows how it is likely that Iraq has the virus, although it was supposed to be held in strict isolation in two labs in the world only after the disease was finally wiped out in 1982. Well written, concise, and chilling. I am surprised that copies are still readily available.

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