

Name _____

Smallpox Hot Topic

DIRECTIONS: Read the article and answer the following questions.

U.S. not ready to destroy smallpox ^{4/23/99} _{NYO}

Although the disease has been eradicated for years, stocks of the virus remain and debate continues over what to do with them.

THE WASHINGTON POST

WASHINGTON — The United States has decided to oppose a plan to destroy the world's remaining known stocks of the deadly smallpox virus, and will argue that destruction should be delayed so virus samples can be used for scientific research, the White House announced Thursday.

The Clinton administration's decision to press for a delay represents a shift in position on one

of the world's longest-running and controversial public health debates. Three years ago the United States, along with most other countries, supported a World Health Organization plan to destroy the virus stocks this June in hopes of ridding the globe of one of its greatest scourges.

The change reflects growing concern that smallpox virus samples may have been obtained by countries other than the United States and Russia, officials said. That increases the likelihood of an accidental or deliberate release of the virus, perhaps by bioterrorists, which could cause a catastrophic disease outbreak.

"I think it's a conviction that the genie's out of the box," said a senior official at the Department

of Health and Human Services.

Smallpox, caused by the variola virus, was a major plague throughout most of history, until the disease was eradicated by a worldwide vaccination campaign lasting from 1966 until 1980. The last reported case occurred in 1978. In this century alone, smallpox killed an estimated 500 million people — more than the century's wars, the 1918 flu epidemic and the AIDS epidemic combined.

The remaining known stocks of virus are held in a high-security facility at the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta and at a laboratory run by the Russian government in Siberia. Russia has consistently opposed destruction of the viral samples.

1. Where are the two stocks of smallpox viruses located?
2. The smallpox disease was eradicated (wiped-out) when?
3. Why does the US oppose a plan to destroy the world's remaining smallpox viruses?
4. What are people afraid of if we do not destroy the viruses?
5. If you had to destroy the virus or keep it, what would you choose and why? (5+ sentences)