3rd Century BCE

Smallpox is present in the Egyptian Empire.

In China, people appealed to the god Yo Hoa Long for protection from smallpox.

Traces of smallpox pustules were found on the head of a 3,000-year-old mummy of the Pharaoh Ramses V.

4th Century BCE

A written description of a disease that clearly resembles smallpox appears in China.

Smallpox goddess Shitala Mata, worshipped in northern India, was considered both the cause and cure of smallpox disease.

5th Century

Increased trade with China and Korea introduces smallpox into Japan.

Japanese woman defeats the "smallpox demon" by wearing red. In Japan, families who fell sick with smallpox set up shrines in their homes to appease the demon.

6th Century

Smallpox is widespread in India. Arab expansion spreads smallpox into northern Africa, Spain, and Portugal.

Smallpox spreads to Asia Minor, the area of present-day Turkey.

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7th Century

Crusades further contribute to the spread of smallpox in Europe with the European Christians moving to and from the Middle East during the next two centuries.

9th Century

Portuguese expeditions to African west coast and new trade routes with eastern parts of Africa introduce the disease into West Africa.

10th Century

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11th Century

Smallpox spreads to Asia Minor, the area of present-day Turkey.

The Ottoman Empire in 1801 extended from Turkey (Anatolia) to Greece, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, northern Africa and parts of Middle East. Smallpox is thought to arrive here from Asia through major trade routes, like the Silk Road.

12th Century

Variolation—a process of grinding up dried smallpox scabs from a smallpox patient and inhaling them or scratching them into an arm of an uninfected person—is being used in China and India to control smallpox.

13th Century

European colonization and the African slave trade import smallpox into the Caribbean and Central and South America.

Population expansion and more frequent travel renders smallpox endemic in previously unaffected Central and North Europe, with severe epidemics occurring as far as Iceland.

14th Century

Variolation is a commonly used method for preventing smallpox in the Ottoman Empire (former Asia Minor, present-day Turkey) and North Africa.

European colonization imports smallpox into North America.

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, a survivor of smallpox herself, had both of her children variolated and was the foremost advocate of the technique in England.

15th Century

Variolation is introduced into England by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, a wife of the British ambassador in Turkey. In 1795, Edward Jenner, an English doctor, shows the effectiveness of previous cowpox infection in protecting people from smallpox, forming the basis for vaccination.

16th Century

Portuguese expeditions to African west coast and new trade routes with eastern parts of Africa introduce the disease into West Africa.

West African god of smallpox Shapona was thought to force the disease upon humans due to his "divine displeasure."

17th Century

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19th Century

Smallpox is widespread in Africa, Asia, and South America in the early 1900s, while Europe and North America have smallpox largely under control through the use of mass vaccination.

After a global eradication campaign that lasted more than 20 years, the 23rd World Health Assembly officially declares the world free of smallpox in 1980.

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