

Edward Jenner

1749 – 1823

What did he discover?

Edward Jenner heard that milkmaids who caught cowpox from their cows could not contract smallpox. He decided to test this theory on his gardener's son.

He rubbed material from some pocks (of a cowpox infected person) into some scratches on the boy's arm. As Jenner predicted the boy contracted cowpox, but he was well again after a week.

Jenner then wanted to test the boy's immunity to smallpox and so he inoculated the boy with the virus and found that he did not contract the smallpox disease.

This breakthrough proved that the cowpox virus could give people immunity to smallpox. Jenner went on to make the cowpox virus easily accessible for other physicians to vaccinate their patients.

His discovery eventually led to the eradication of smallpox from the entire planet. Not only did Jenner cure the world of smallpox, but he also invented a new technique for preventing disease, which we know today as vaccination.

Something to think about...

Why do you think scientific discoveries are sometimes not accepted until many years later?