



Federal Occupational Health Update on Smallpox Immunization Strategies

Revised December 26, 2002

A few weeks ago, the President announced the long-awaited plan to offer and administer the smallpox vaccine to targeted groups of Americans and better protect the country against the threat of the intentional use of smallpox as a biological weapon. This message is intended to provide a brief summary of the President's plan to assist in answering questions we have received from individual employees and customer agencies regarding the availability of the vaccine.

In his announcement, the President authorized release of the vaccine to the following groups in a phased approach:

Phase I - Smallpox Response Teams and Military Personnel

Members of the Smallpox Response Teams are limited to people who will administer the smallpox vaccine in the event of an emergency; will be the first to investigate and evaluate initial suspected case(s) of smallpox; and initiate measures to control the outbreak. The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) will continue to advise and assist states in the identification and development of these teams. Participation in the vaccination program by healthcare personnel on these response teams is purely voluntary. Currently, the states and local health departments have identified approximately 500,000 healthcare personnel who would be offered the vaccine as part the smallpox response teams plus another 500,000 military personnel who are or will be deployed to high-risk areas. Vaccination for designated Military Personnel, which is mandatory, began immediately but the rest of Phase I is not expected to begin until late January 2003, after the immunity against vaccine liability portion of the Homeland Security Bill takes effect.

Phase II - Other First Responders

The CDC are working with the states to identify a second larger group of recipients who prudently should be offered the vaccine which may include law enforcement personnel such as police, firefighters, EMTs, first responders, other health professionals in hospitals and other public health workers that didn't get vaccinated in the first phase. **The exact dates and details of this phase of the plan are still being developed**, but will not begin until the first one is completed, which is expected to take at least 30 days. Therefore, it would seem likely that Phase II would begin in March 2003, at the earliest.

Phase III - General Public

Unless there is a known outbreak or exposure to smallpox, HHS currently does **NOT** recommend that those in the general public at low risk take the vaccine. However, once the first 2 phases have been completed and enough vaccine is available, there is a plan to eventually offer the vaccine to the general public to those who want it. Based on current production and delivery schedules, this will probably not occur before the end of 2003 or 2004. Again, the details of how the vaccine would be distributed and offered have not been defined. (Stockpiles of existing vaccine would be released immediately in an emergency)

What is FOH's Role in the President's Smallpox Vaccination Plan?

As was stated previously, it is NOT anticipated that FOH clinics or staff would be involved in the investigations of any outbreaks or direct patient care, and therefore would not participate in Phase I of the plan. Similarly, mass immunization campaigns, should they be necessary in the event of an outbreak, would be directed and coordinated by the state and local public health authorities **through specially designated and trained smallpox vaccination clinics, and not involve FOH health centers.** However, it is very possible that some individuals in our customer agencies may be designated as high risk/first responders who should be offered the vaccine in Phase II of the plan, and we may be asked at that time to assist in delivering those services once they are identified. ***However, it is important to understand that the CDC still has complete control of the supplies of the vaccine and none have been released to FOH. If and ONLY until ALL the following steps occur, FOH will be unable to assist in providing vaccines to their employees:***

- The specific groups for Phase II are identified;
- Phase II plans are finalized and approved by HHS/CDC;
- We are specifically requested by the HHS/CDC to administer the vaccine to those groups;
- The serum is released to FOH **AND**
- We have been given and are able to provide the proper training and protocols to our providers.

Further detailed information on smallpox disease, transmission, the vaccine, side effects and who should not receive it are available on various fact sheets on the CDC website at: <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/smallpox/overview/faq.asp>