



STATE OF NEW YORK  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

433 River Street, Suite 303

Troy, New York 12180-2299

Antonia C. Novello, M.D., M.P.H. Dr. P.H.  
*Commissioner*

Dennis P. Whalen  
*Executive Deputy Commissioner*

January, 21, 2003

**Re: Vaccination Program for Health Care  
Smallpox Response Teams**

Dear Hospital Chief Executive Officer or President:

On Friday, December 13, 2002, President Bush announced a voluntary smallpox vaccination program that will target approximately 30,000 health care workers in New York State. The New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) has asked all acute care hospitals to identify employees who would be interested in volunteering to serve on the hospital's health care smallpox response teams. These teams will care for the first suspected or confirmed patients if a smallpox outbreak occurred and until other hospital workers could be vaccinated. To ensure protection of those staff who volunteer to serve on these teams, we will be offering smallpox vaccine to potential volunteers as long as they, or their close contacts, do not have any of the medical conditions that put them at higher risk for complications from the smallpox vaccine. Educational sessions for the volunteers will be conducted prior to actual selection for inoculation. These sessions will focus on key aspects of the program: (a) identifying potential vaccinees, (b) description of the medical contraindications for exclusion criteria (c) monitoring for vaccine take and site checks, (d) adverse event surveillance and clinical management and (e) information technology issues.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has approved our plan for smallpox vaccination of health care and public health/public safety smallpox response teams. The vaccination of hospital-based Health Care Smallpox Response Teams is anticipated to begin in March 2003, starting at approximately eight hospitals and then expanding in April, 2003 to all other participating hospitals.

Although the smallpox vaccination program will not start until March 2003, we recognize the need for you to begin informing your staff about this program now, given all the recent media attention to the plans for vaccinating health care workers. Therefore, we are also attaching a template "Dear Staff" letter and Question and Answer Sheet that address issues related to smallpox, the vaccine and the State's vaccination plan. These are meant for you to send as is, or modify if needed, to health care workers in your institution. Additional information will be provided to all potential vaccinees at the educational sessions that will be conducted starting in February, 2003.

At this time, we ask that you begin to formulate the smallpox response team for your facility. To assist you in determining the recommended composition of the team, we are attaching the team structure guidance as a tool for you to use in your planning. Additionally, you should be working with your local / county health department who will take the lead in the vaccination process of your employees in the first phase of vaccinations.

**You will need to submit the tentative/anticipated number of potential vaccinees to your local / county health department as soon as possible but no later than January 31, 2003.**

Further information regarding the dates and times of the educational sessions for hospital teams will be forthcoming from your local health department.

Should you have any questions regarding this correspondence or the program plans, please contact the Hospital Bioterrorism Preparedness Program at The New York State Department of Health at 518-408-5163.

Thank you for your cooperation and attention in this matter.

Sincerely,

Judith A. Faust  
Director  
Hospital Bioterrorism Preparedness Program  
New York State Department of Health

