

NYSDOH Template Letter to be sent to Hospital Staff

Dear Hospital Employee:

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 in the state to identify employees who would be interested in serving 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 assure protection of all staff who volunteer to serve on these teams, we will be offering smallpox vaccine to selected volunteers who do not themselves, or their close contacts, have any of the medical conditions that put them at higher risk for complications from the smallpox vaccine.

In the weeks ahead, we will be giving you more information about this voluntary smallpox vaccination program. You will be notified of general information sessions for those employees who might be interested in volunteering for smallpox vaccination. After the initial educational sessions, there will be additional sessions held which will be required for those who are seriously considering vaccination. We will keep you informed about the date, time, and locations of these upcoming information session(s). Smallpox vaccination clinics will not start until sometime in March 2003.

The New York State Department of Health and this hospital are committed to making sure that this voluntary smallpox vaccination program is done as safely as possible. It is important for all employees who are thinking about volunteering for this program to understand that the smallpox vaccine can cause serious side effects, and that people with certain health problems should not volunteer for this program.

You should not volunteer for smallpox vaccination if you, a member of your household or a close intimate contact have any of the following medical conditions:

- Weakened immune systems - including persons with HIV infection or AIDS, cancer, leukemia, lymphoma, organ transplants, severe autoimmune diseases (like lupus), or problems producing antibodies (for example, the disease agammaglobulinemia *{lack of normal antibodies}*) or persons being treated with chemotherapy, radiation therapy, high dose steroids (such as high doses of prednisone) or other medicines that weaken the immune system.
- A history of EVER having the skin diseases named "eczema or atopic dermatitis" (*Persons who have ever had a skin problem that caused them to have red, scaly, itchy skin for more than 2 weeks that was not due to another cause, comes and goes and , may have the diseases of eczema/atopic dermatitis*). Please talk to your doctor if you are not sure if you have ever had eczema or atopic dermatitis; if there is any question about whether or not you have these diseases, we recommend that you not get the vaccine at this time.

- Any currently active skin diseases that causes breaks in the skin, such as burns, psoriasis, shingles, an allergic rash, impetigo, or severe acne (If these skin diseases are not active and have healed, it is okay to get the vaccine).
- Women who are pregnant or who will be trying to get pregnant in the four weeks after vaccination.

In addition to the health conditions listed above, persons who themselves have any of the following health problems or conditions should NOT get the smallpox vaccine:

- Women who are breastfeeding,
- Anyone who is ill at the time of the vaccination clinic, and
- Anyone with allergies to one of the antibiotics in the vaccine (*polymyxin B, streptomycin, chlortetracycline, or neomycin*)

If you are unable or uninterested in volunteering for smallpox vaccination, you do not need to explain why you are not volunteering, and your job will not be affected. On the other hand, if you decide to be vaccinated, you will be expected to be available to take care of any suspected or confirmed smallpox patients who are admitted to our hospital, should a smallpox outbreak occur in New York State.

We have included a copy of an information packet for health care workers that was provided by the NYSDOH to help answer any additional concerns or questions that you may have about this smallpox vaccine program.

Although we hope that we will never face a smallpox outbreak in New York State, the events of last year have taught us that it is essential to be as prepared as possible, especially against the threats of terrorism.

Thank you for considering participation in this voluntary smallpox vaccination program. We will continue to provide you with more information, as it becomes available, and will announce to the hospital community the exact dates, times, and locations of the upcoming smallpox vaccination information sessions.

Sincerely,