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NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE BEGINS VOLUNTARY SMALLPOX VACCINATIONS

Small Group of DOHMH Staff are Vaccinated First

NEW YORK CITY – FEB. 19, 2003 – As part of the City’s ongoing public health emergency preparedness efforts, the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) began its voluntary smallpox vaccination program today with the inoculation of five DOHMH medical staff. Those who received vaccinations today will be monitored closely to make sure that the vaccination was successful and for any adverse effects. In the coming weeks and months, other public health, public safety and health care workers will also be vaccinated. By the end of May 2003, the goal is to vaccinate between 5,000 – 10,000 health and safety workers. **There are currently no plans to offer vaccination to the general public.**

DOHMH Commissioner Thomas R. Frieden, MD, MPH said, “Over the past several months, we have worked intensively with local health and safety workers to prepare for the possibility of a bioterrorist event. This vaccination program is an important step in our preparedness efforts and once again emphasizes the link between public health and public safety. Those vaccinated today and those who will be vaccinated in the coming weeks and months are volunteering to perform critical tasks if a smallpox outbreak were to occur, including caring for and investigating any smallpox cases. For most people, the vaccine is safe. However, as there are risks associated with taking the smallpox vaccine, we will closely monitor the condition of everyone vaccinated.”

Successful Vaccinations and Adverse Reactions (Side Effects) of the Smallpox Vaccine

All individuals who receive the vaccine will be monitored to ensure the vaccinations are successful and to monitor for any signs of complication. DOHMH’s Web site (nyc.gov/health) will be updated to report the progress of the New York City smallpox vaccination plan. For more information on the smallpox vaccine, visit cdc.gov/smallpox and nyc.gov/health/smallpox.

If a vaccination is successful, a red and itchy bump will form on the vaccine site in three to four days. About a week after vaccination, the bump will become a large blister, fill with pus, and then begin to drain. In about two weeks, the blister will begin to dry up and a scab will form. The scab usually falls off about three weeks after the vaccination, leaving a small scar. When people receive the vaccine for the first time, the possibility of redness and swelling tend to be greater than for those who have received the vaccine previously.

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Normal reactions to the vaccine are usually mild and temporary, though some people who receive the vaccine may become sick enough to miss some work. Most symptoms occur about one week after vaccination. The blister and the scab that develop are normal reactions to the vaccine virus. Most people also have some itchiness, pain and swelling at the vaccination site. Other common side effects are: fever, swollen lymph glands, fatigue, headache, nausea, and muscle aches the vaccine site. In some people, the local swelling and redness can be severe, but this will usually get better on its own.

There can be more serious side effects in some people who receive the smallpox vaccine. Fortunately, these reactions are much less common among healthy people as compared with those who have certain serious health problems or conditions. These reactions are also more common among people who receive the smallpox vaccine for the first time compared to persons who had been vaccinated at some other time in their lives. The most severe reactions can include extensive skin rash over large areas of the body away from the vaccine site, vaccine sites that do not heal, and encephalitis (swelling of the brain). Available treatments for these reactions include supportive therapy and, for the skin conditions, an injection of immune globulin (antibodies). In rare instances, people have had life-threatening reactions, and, based on past experience, it is estimated that one person out of every 1 million people vaccinated for the first time and one person out of every 4 million who are re-vaccinated may die as a result of reactions to the vaccine.

Participation in the Voluntary Vaccination Program

94% of City's Hospitals Have Agreed to Participate in Voluntary Smallpox Vaccination Program

Everyone who volunteers to receive the vaccination is required to participate in educational sessions and will be carefully screened for any medical contraindications that would put them at increased risk for adverse reactions to the vaccine. The risk of adverse effects is much (5 to 10 times) lower among those previously vaccinated and it is hoped that these individuals will be among the first to volunteer to participate in the program. DOHMH recommends that those who do not know their HIV status get an HIV test. Anyone with a medical contraindication will not be permitted to participate in the voluntary vaccination program. Anyone who has any of the following health conditions, or lives with someone or has close contact with someone (e.g., sex partner) with any of these conditions, should not get vaccinated at this time:

- Weakened immune systems (e.g., persons with HIV infection, cancers, organ transplants, people on chemotherapy or taking steroids or other immunosuppressive drugs).
- A history of EVER having the skin diseases eczema or atopic dermatitis.
- Any active skin diseases, such as burns, shingles, severe acne, etc. (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, women who are breastfeeding, anyone who is ill at the time of vaccination, anyone who is using steroid eye drops, and anyone with allergies to one of the ingredients in the vaccine (polymyxin B, streptomycin, chlortetracycline, or neomycin) or a severe allergy to latex (anaphylaxis reaction, including severe swelling, hives or difficulty breathing) should not be vaccinated at this time. DOHMH also recommends that persons with a child less than 1 year of age in the home not be vaccinated at this time. For more information on medical contraindications to the smallpox vaccine, visit cdc.gov/smallpox and nyc.gov/health/smallpox.

(NOTE: If a smallpox outbreak were to occur, these contraindications to vaccination would no longer apply in all circumstances because the risk from the vaccine might be outweighed by the risk of serious illness from smallpox. If there were an outbreak, anyone who was exposed to, or thought to have been exposed to smallpox, would be offered vaccine, regardless of the underlying conditions outlined above. Vaccinations would be provided as needed to prevent smallpox infection and to stop the spread of the disease.)

As announced last week, DOHMH is beginning its vaccination program after extensively educating and training these individuals about the smallpox vaccine, its possible side effects, and the commitment of volunteering to be a first responder. The program beginning today will continue with the vaccination of additional DOHMH staff through mid-March. Beginning in mid-March, others who volunteer, including health care workers in most hospitals and some public safety personnel, will also be vaccinated. The first phase of the vaccination program is expected to continue through the end of May 2003. At the end of this period, it is expected that 5,000 - 10,000 individuals will have been vaccinated.

Historical Facts about Smallpox

In most parts of the world, routine smallpox vaccinations ended by 1980, after a successful vaccination campaign by the World Health Organization to eradicate smallpox. In the United States, routine smallpox vaccination ended for the general public in 1972. The last known case of smallpox in New York City was in 1947, after which, in just over 3 weeks, more than 6 million people were vaccinated. The last known case of smallpox in the United States was in Texas in 1949. For information about smallpox disease, visit **nyc.gov/health** and **www.cdc.gov**.

For More Information

Information for health care professionals and others participating in Phase One of the Voluntary vaccination program is available on the DOHMH website at <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/bt/smallpox1.html> or on the CDC website at <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/smallpox/index.asp>. A toll free public information hotline has been established by CDC at **1-888-246-2675**; 1-888-246-2857 for Spanish speakers and 1-866-874-2646 for TTY. The hotlines operate from 8:00 A.M. – 11:00 P.M., Monday through Friday, and 10:00 A.M. – 8:00 P.M., Saturdays and Sundays.

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