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## NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE

OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS  
125 WORTH STREET, ROOM 329  
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10013  
(212) 788-5290 FAX: (212) 788-4749

[nyc.gov/health](http://nyc.gov/health)

THOMAS R. FRIEDEN, MD, MPH  
*Commissioner*

SANDRA MULLIN  
*Associate Commissioner*

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**Thursday, February 13, 2003**

**CONTACT: Sandra Mullin/Andrew Tucker**  
**(212) 788-5290; (212) 764-7667**

### **NEW YORK CITY TO BEGIN VOLUNTARY SMALLPOX VACCINATION PROGRAM FOR STRATEGIC RESERVE OF HEALTH AND SAFETY WORKERS ON FEBRUARY 19, 2003**

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

NEW YORK CITY – FEB. 13, 2003 – The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) announced today that, after meticulous preparatory education and training activities, the City's voluntary smallpox vaccination program will begin on February 19. The program will start by administering vaccine to DOHMH staff, and 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. Last week, DOHMH received its first shipment of vaccine from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Since an earlier announcement in December about the City's plans to participate in the vaccination program recommended by the CDC, DOHMH has been meeting with hospitals, unions, the Police and Fire Departments, the Office of Emergency Management, HIV/AIDS groups, and other organizations to review the voluntary vaccination plan and to address concerns.

As of today, 68 out of a total of 72 hospitals in New York City have agreed to vaccinate teams of their workers and to participate in Phase One of the program. Four hospitals have elected not to participate in Phase One but will participate in some aspects of pre-event smallpox planning including the identification of patient care teams. ***NOTE: THERE ARE CURRENTLY NO PLANS TO OFFER VACCINATION TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC.***

DOHMH Commissioner Dr. Thomas R. Frieden said, "The participation of 94% of the City's hospitals in the vaccination program is a strong indication of the desire of health and safety personnel to be fully prepared in the event of a smallpox attack. Those to be vaccinated at this time are, in essence, volunteering in advance to provide immediate care for the first case or cases of smallpox, and to assist in the vaccination of others, if an outbreak were to occur."

"In implementing this voluntary smallpox vaccination program, we wanted to make sure that all participants had ample time to consider the risks of smallpox vaccination and to be fully educated about the risks and benefits of vaccination," Dr. Frieden continued.

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“We are moving with all due caution, and erring on the side of safety. For several weeks, DOHMH has been disseminating educational material to hospitals, and the police and fire departments, and has provided numerous trainings on various aspects of the program.”

### **Education and Training**

DOHMH education sessions have covered such topics as:

- Smallpox overview
- New York City’s smallpox vaccination plan
- Smallpox vaccine administration
- Liability, compensation, sick leave issues
- Mental health issues
- Pre- and post-vaccination clinic activities
- Adverse events: Diagnosis, Treatment, Reporting
- Risk communication

Thus far, 1,400 attendees – mainly team leaders and administrators – have participated in DOHMH trainings, many of which were based on a “train-the-trainer” model. Educational sessions and materials will continue to be made available to additional hospital workers, public safety units, and DOHMH teams.

### **Participation in the Voluntary Vaccination Program**

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.

Everyone who volunteers to receive the vaccination is required to participate in an educational session and will be carefully screened for any medical contraindications that would put them at increased risk for adverse reactions to the vaccine. Those who don’t know their HIV status are recommended to 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, and anyone with allergies to one of the ingredients in the vaccine should not volunteer during this vaccination program. DOHMH also recommends that person with a child less than 1 year of age in the home not be vaccinated at this time.

*(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 above underlying conditions. Vaccinations would be provided as needed to prevent smallpox infection and to stop the spread of the disease.)*

Dr. Frieden concluded, “The broad support for the City’s voluntary smallpox vaccination program is a tribute to the commitment of those in the public health, health care and public safety professions to the City’s well being. I thank these individuals for their dedication and strong sense of citizenship.”

### **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 1977. 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](http://nyc.gov/health) and [www.cdc.gov](http://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 the 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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