



# THE CITY OF NEW YORK

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE

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Mayor

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

## **2003 ALERT # 9: Smallpox Vaccination Has Begun for New York City Hospital Employees, Public Health Personnel, and Public Safety Workers**

- **ALL providers in New York City (NYC) should be alert for patients with adverse reactions to smallpox vaccination and must report suspected cases immediately to the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (NYC DOHMH).**
- **To report a suspected adverse reaction to smallpox vaccination in a vaccine recipient or suspected vaccinia in a close contact, please call 1-866-NYC-DOH1 (1-866-692-3641) during normal business hours. After hours call the NYC Poison Control Center at 212-POISONS (212-764-7667).**
- **NYC DOHMH will assist with clinical management of serious adverse reactions to smallpox vaccine, and in obtaining vaccine immune globulin (VIG) or other medications, if indicated.**

**Please distribute to colleagues in Allergy and Immunology, Cardiology, Critical Care, Dermatology, Emergency Medicine, Family Practice, Infectious Disease, Internal Medicine, Laboratory Medicine, Neurology, Ophthalmology and Pediatrics**

March 20, 2003

Dear Colleagues,

In an effort to prepare for the possibility of a smallpox outbreak due to a bioterrorist attack, the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (NYC DOHMH) and its partners have begun to vaccinate health care workers in eight hospitals, public safety workers (from the New York City Police Department and the Fire Department of New York City), and public health personnel (from NYC DOHMH) against smallpox. Most other acute care hospitals (n=60) in New York City will begin vaccinations in mid-April. This program for voluntary smallpox vaccination of health care and public health personnel will continue for several months.

Smallpox vaccine recipients in New York City who experience an adverse event following vaccination are being encouraged to seek care at the facility where they received the vaccine, but they may elect to go to other hospitals or to their primary care physician for evaluation and medical care. **Any health care provider in New York City may be called upon to treat a vaccine recipient with an adverse event or a contact of a vaccinee with possible vaccinia virus infection.** This memorandum provides information on the recognition of reactions to smallpox vaccine, the requirements for reporting suspect adverse events to the DOHMH and how to obtain assistance in the diagnosis and management of these reactions.

**ALL moderate or severe adverse reactions to smallpox vaccine in New York City residents must be reported promptly to the NYC DOHMH, per recent amendment to the New York State Sanitary Code. Any life-threatening illness following smallpox vaccination, as well as any suspected case of vaccinia virus infection in a close contact of a vaccine recipient (inadvertent inoculation) must also be reported immediately.**

**Report these cases immediately by calling 1-866-NYC-DOH1 or after hours, call 1-212-POISONS. You will also receive assistance with patient management and information on how to obtain Vaccinia Immune Globulin (VIG) or cidofovir, if indicated.**

**Moderate or severe adverse reactions to smallpox vaccination include:**

Bacterial superinfection, eczema vaccinatum, fetal vaccinia (including spontaneous abortion), generalized vaccinia, inadvertent inoculation (accidental implantation) in a vaccine recipient or close contact, ocular vaccinia (including vaccinia keratitis), post-vaccinial encephalitis or encephalomyelitis, progressive vaccinia (vaccinia necrosum), severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis), Stevens-Johnson syndrome or erythema multiforme, or suspected vaccinia in a non-vaccinee.

Detailed information on recognizing, diagnosing and reporting adverse reactions to smallpox vaccination (including photographs of typical adverse reactions) is included in a guidance tool developed by NYC DOHMH (attached) and is also available from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in a recent publication (*Smallpox Vaccinations and Adverse Reactions: Guidance for Clinicians. MMWR Dispatch 2003;52:1-28, February 21, 2003, available at [www.cdc.gov/mmwr/PDF/RR/RR5204.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/PDF/RR/RR5204.pdf)*). Extensive educational materials on smallpox vaccination and smallpox disease, including clinical evaluation tools for patients with possible adverse reactions, and an image library depicting expected and adverse reactions to smallpox vaccination, are available on the CDC smallpox website at [www.cdc.gov/smallpox](http://www.cdc.gov/smallpox), the IDSA website at [www.idsociety.org/bt/biotemplate.cfm?template=sm\\_summary.htm](http://www.idsociety.org/bt/biotemplate.cfm?template=sm_summary.htm), and the NYC DOHMH website at [www.nyc.gov/health/smallpox](http://www.nyc.gov/health/smallpox).

The NYC DOHMH will assist with the diagnosis and management of adverse events following smallpox vaccination. Digital photographs of skin or ocular lesions may be very useful, and can be transmitted to the NYC DOHMH and the CDC, provided careful protection of patient confidentiality is maintained. NYC DOHMH will be contacting hospitals shortly with instructions on how to send digital photos securely.

Recently, cases of myocarditis and pericarditis have been reported among US military personnel following smallpox vaccination. Although these conditions have not been established as known adverse reactions causally related to the smallpox vaccine, the NYC DOHMH requests that

providers also report these or any other serious illnesses occurring within the month following smallpox vaccination.

**Reports should be submitted on a New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene Smallpox Vaccination Adverse Events Reporting Form (attached here).** Reporting forms will be made available at vaccination clinic sites, and can also be downloaded at [www.nyc.gov/health/smallpox](http://www.nyc.gov/health/smallpox) or requested by calling **1-866-NYC-DOH1**. Completed forms should be faxed to 212-227-3842 or 212-227-3843. Providers do NOT need to file VAERS reports with the federal government if a report form is sent to the NYC DOHMH. The NYC DOHMH will notify CDC of the case and complete the VAERS report on any case reported to us.

Health care providers treating patients with suspected adverse reactions to smallpox vaccination or close contacts with suspected vaccinia infections should observe contact precautions to prevent nosocomial transmission of vaccinia virus. Patients do not require respiratory isolation. Health care providers with contraindications to smallpox vaccination should avoid providing direct care for patients with suspected or confirmed vaccinia lesions. Care should be taken to counsel patients to avoid transmitting vaccinia virus to other individuals who may be at high risk for serious illness due to vaccinia infection (e.g., persons with atopic dermatitis or eczema, persons with immunodeficiencies, pregnant women, or infants under the age of one year). Additional information regarding infection control practices may be found in a recent publication of CDC, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) and the Healthcare Infection Control Practices Advisory Committee (HICPAC) (*Recommendations for Using Smallpox Vaccine in a Pre-Event Vaccination Program. MMWR Dispatch 2003;52:1-16, February 26, 2003, available at [www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/wk/mmDispatch2-26-03.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/wk/mmDispatch2-26-03.pdf)*).

Testing for vaccinia by PCR is available at the NYC DOHMH Public Health Laboratories (PHL). In addition, tests for diseases that may be considered differential diagnoses for rash illness (Varicella Zoster Virus [by PCR and DFA] and Herpes Simplex Virus [by DFA]) are also available at PHL. If laboratory diagnosis is indicated, the NYC DOHMH medical and laboratory staff will provide guidance to you regarding what specimens to collect, and how to submit specimens.

As always, your cooperation in identifying and documenting any adverse reactions related to this vaccination program is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

**Stephen Friedman, MD, MPH**  
Stephen Friedman, MD, MPH

**Jane R. Zucker, MD, MSc**  
Jane R. Zucker, MD, MSc

*Attachments:*

NYC Smallpox Vaccination Adverse Event Reporting Form and Guidance on Reporting Adverse Events Following Smallpox Vaccination  
NYC DOHMH Clinical Guidelines on Recognition, Evaluation and Treatment of Moderate or Severe Adverse Reactions Following Smallpox Vaccination