

The Smallpox Vaccine Program: **Should YOU Volunteer?**

The Bush Administration is asking front line hospital workers to **volunteer** to be vaccinated against smallpox. No smallpox disease has occurred anywhere in the world for 25 years.

The risk of a smallpox attack is unknown.

The dangers of smallpox vaccine are well documented.

WEIGH THE FACTS BEFORE YOU VOLUNTEER!

Fact #1: The decision to be vaccinated is strictly VOLUNTARY.

- As a health care worker, you likely will be among those asked to volunteer.
- The decision you make will affect you, your patients and your family.
- The decision whether or not to be vaccinated is *yours alone*.

Fact #2: Smallpox vaccination carries significant risks.

The vaccine infects you with "live" *vaccinia* virus, a weaker "pox" type virus, that protects you against smallpox.

- *Vaccinia* virus is not the smallpox virus and cannot give you smallpox.
- The vaccine is effective in preventing the disease; in fact you have a 90% chance of preventing the disease if you are vaccinated within four days *after* exposure.
- This vaccine has been described as the "least safe human vaccine."

It can cause severe reactions, complications and even death.

- Because the vaccine contains live *vaccinia* virus, it can spread to other parts of your body or even infect family members, co-workers and possibly patients.
- 15 out of every 1 million people vaccinated for the first time will face life-threatening complications.
- Many more will suffer from fever and swollen lymph nodes.
- One third of those vaccinated become sick enough to miss at least one day of work.
- Severe side effects usually appear within three weeks.
- One or two people out of every 1 million people vaccinated will die.

Reactions to the vaccine are less common for those being revaccinated.

- Volunteers who were vaccinated for smallpox in the 50s, 60s or early 70s should have fewer reactions when they are revaccinated, but reactions can still be severe.
- It is not clear whether those who were previously vaccinated still have immunity, as it is believed that booster shots are needed every five to 10 years.

Fact #3: You should not volunteer if you have any risk factors.

Don't volunteer to get vaccinated if you have any of these conditions or live in a household with someone who has any of these conditions:

- HIV, or do not know if you have HIV;
- cancer or any other medical conditions that compromises your immune system;
- skin disorders such as eczema or dermatitis (current or past);
- allergies to certain antibiotics used with the vaccine;
- allergies to latex products;
- a medical need to take high doses of steroids; or
- pregnancy or are considering it soon.

Fact #4: Safeguards should be in place.

Before you volunteer to be vaccinated, find out about the following protections:

- a **training and education program** that includes the opportunity to ask questions;
- free, **on-the-clock counseling** to help you decide whether you should be vaccinated;
- **medical screening** and free and confidential medical testing to ensure you and members of your household have no conditions--such as HIV infection, pregnancy, antibiotic allergies, eczema and other skin disorders--related to adverse vaccine reactions;
- an **understandable informed consent form**;
- plans for on-site daily **monitoring and care** of the vaccination site and **tracking and reporting** of complications;
- a plan to **protect immune-compromised patients** from recently vaccinated health care workers;
- clear policies concerning **coverage of lost work time** for vaccination-related illnesses;
- **compensation** for personal, family and patient **medical costs** caused by vaccine complications;
- a clear written policy that health care workers will not suffer **discrimination** for refusing to participate in any smallpox vaccination program; and
- an agreement to use safer vaccination needles with integrated safety features as required by the federal ***Needlestick Prevention and Safety Act of 2000***.

For more information

- Contact your local union steward or representative.
- Go to SEIU's Web site at www.SeiuSmallpox.org
- Download CDC's brochure with pictures of normal and severe reactions to the smallpox vaccine is available at www.bt.cdc.gov/training/smallpoxvaccine/reactions
- Additional information about smallpox and the vaccine is on CDC's Web site at www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/smallpox/vaccination/facts.asp.

Sources:

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"Bush to Order Smallpox Vaccine for Some," *The New York Times*, November 27, 2002.

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NIOSH Alert: Preventing Allergic Reactions to Natural Rubber Latex in the Workplace (June 1997), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, www.cdc.gov/niosh/latexalt.html.