

Department of  
Veterans Affairs

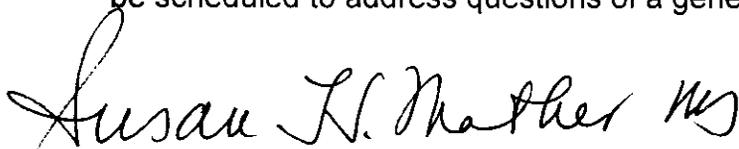
# Memorandum

Date: June 24, 2003  
From: Chief Public Health and Environmental Hazards Officer (13)  
Subj: VA Smallpox Vaccination Plan Using VA Vaccine Supplies  
To: VISN Directors and Chief Medical Officers (10N1-23)

Thru: Deputy Under Secretary for Health (10A) *D. for G. H.*  
Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management (10N) *ll*

1. On December 31, 2002, the President announced a national smallpox vaccination plan to vaccinate health care providers and first responders in the event of smallpox being used as an agent of terror or warfare. The Department of Veterans Affairs developed a plan to vaccinate smallpox health care response teams (SHRTs) of approximately 100 members and smallpox vaccination teams (SVTs), a 10 member subset of the SHRT at 90 medical centers chosen because of the capacity for caring for cases of smallpox and to ensure adequate geographic distribution. Vaccine was distributed by CDC through the state and local health departments and a number of VAMCs participated in their vaccination efforts.
2. As of June 1, 2003, 1254 members of the SHRTs/SVTs had been vaccinated. Each VISN has at least 10 members vaccinated although the response has varied from VISN to VISN with VISN 21 having the smallest number (8) and VISN 15 having the largest number (189). CDC also provided 9000 doses of vaccine to VA and on May 30, 2003 the necessary MOUs were signed to allow this to be used to vaccinate additional VA employees. (If the vaccine is not used it will be kept on hand to begin a post-event vaccination program if necessary.)
3. The vaccine is the Wyeth Dryvax product. The expiration date on the specific lots in VA's possession was extended to August 2003 and September 2003. It may be extended further at that time. The vaccine is packaged in 100 dose vials although experience is showing that most have 80 to 90 doses in them. Once reconstituted, the properly maintained vaccine is good for 90 days. Both the dry and reconstituted vaccines have very specific temperature requirements for maintenance, requiring the involvement of a licensed pharmacist in any VA program. The pharmacist must review all plans to transport and store vaccine, including those addressing sharing with other facilities.

4. VA facilities can begin vaccinating employees using this vaccine, currently being maintained at the Hines facility. In order to begin this process, a facility must assure that those local smallpox vaccination plans, which include use of VA vaccine, will include at a minimum:
  - a. Training of the Vaccination Team who will be doing the pre-vaccination screening and counseling and the actual vaccinations.
  - b. Documentation of counseling, informed consent, and tracking of any reactions and positive "takes."
  - c. The name and contact information of the pharmacist to whom the vaccine will be shipped and who will be responsible for tracking the vaccine in the facility
  - d. The name and contact information of the person who will receive the PVN labels that will be applied to individual vaccinee's occupational health record in order to identify vaccine lot.
  - e. Certification that the facility has a refrigerator that will provide emergency back up power and a temperature monitor/alarm.
  - f. Reporting of reactions and vaccinations to CDC and VACO.
  
5. An Institute of Medicine advisory committee issued a report January 17, 2003 calling for greater caution in implementing the federal smallpox vaccination program. The report urged the CDC to clarify the vaccine's risks and benefits for recipients and to carefully evaluate data from the first round of smallpox vaccinations before proceeding further. They also issued a letter report on May 23, 2003, which considered the next steps in a pre-event vaccination program, and which reaffirmed the need for a pause in the program before the vaccine is offered more widely. However, since there are VAMCs which have not been able to participate in local health department programs to vaccinate members of their smallpox vaccination teams and smallpox health care response teams, VA will continue to offer vaccine to those health care professionals who volunteer to be a part of the VA teams as described in phase I of the smallpox vaccination plan. There is no plan to extend vaccinations in VA beyond key team members at this time.
  
6. Questions about the Vaccination Program may be referred to the Office of Public Health and Environmental Hazards (202-273-8575). Questions about the vaccine may be referred to Wes Robbins, Pharm.D. at the PBM in Hines (708-786-7971) and questions about training can be referred to Pam Hebert, PhD at Birmingham (205-731-1812 X315). A nationwide conference call will be scheduled to address questions of a general nature.



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