



The CBCSF Newsletter

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A Publication of Community Blood Centers of South Florida, Inc.

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Smallpox Vaccinations & The Blood Supply

On December 13, 2002 President Bush announced a voluntary federal program to vaccinate the majority of Americans against the threat of terrorist released smallpox. The blood supply of the entire country will be affected by this program.

The vaccine to be used is based on live vaccinia virus - the cause of cowpox (*vaca*, Latin, of or relating to cows) which is a close relative of variola virus - the virus which causes smallpox. The development of immunity to one protects against the other. Live virus vaccines are inherently dangerous since the virus may spread uncontrollably in a small number of people causing severe and sometimes fatal illnesses and can be found in the blood of recently vaccinated people for up to 56 days.

The Smallpox Virus

Smallpox is a DNA-containing virus whose only known host is human beings. The disease is spread through the respiratory tract during close contact with an infected person. The first symptom appears after an incubation period of about 12 days and usually consists of the onset of fever. The pox lesions start several days later spreading from the face, mouth, head, and fore-

arms to the rest of the body. Other symptoms include headache, muscle pains, vomiting, and life threatening secondary bacterial infections. The pox lesions heal leaving a scar. Mortality rates in unvaccinated infected people approach 30% in adults and 50% in children under the age of 8. Mortality rates for transplant recipients, patients with AIDS or cancer may be 100%.

"The blood supply of the entire country will be affected by the [Smallpox] program. If the entire population of the country is going to be vaccinated within a few weeks of the outbreak of smallpox, who will be left to donate blood?"

The last case of smallpox in the United States occurred in 1949. Vaccinations were stopped in the U.S. in 1972 because the complications of vaccination were greater than the theoretical risk of smallpox. The World Health Organization organized an international vaccination program in the early 1970's and declared global eradication three years after the last reported case of smallpox in Somalia in 1977.

The old Soviet Union weaponized smallpox in the 1980's. The danger to the worldwide public is that some of the Soviet Union's stocks may be released somewhere in the world by terrorists. A smallpox epidemic in an unvaccinated population would be catastrophic. Massive vaccination programs are possible in developed countries, but there is not enough existing vaccine to inoculate the world's population on short notice.

Restarting the Vaccination Program

Because of the terrorist threat, the US government is implementing a three phase public health vaccination program. The first phase consists of offering voluntary vaccination to the 50,000 healthcare workers who are most likely to be exposed to the first cases of smallpox.

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In phase 2 the vaccine will be offered on a voluntary basis to approximately 10,000,000 health care workers, emergency medical personnel, ambulance drivers, fireman, policeman, and others who may be exposed to victims of smallpox in the course of their work duties. All other residents of the United States would be offered voluntary vaccinations as part of phase 3 within 2 years or immediately if a smallpox outbreak occurs anywhere in the world.

Important Information!

Be sure to give the registrar your email address when you register and receive these newsletters by email or via our website www.cbcsf.org. MSN or AOL users should add webmaster@cbcsf.org to their list of safe contacts.

Confidentiality Statement: Community Blood Centers of South Florida is committed to respecting your privacy. We will not share, rent, or sell personal information provided by you, including your email address, to other parties. The information you provide will only be used to support your relationship with us as a blood donor or potential donor.

Restarting smallpox vaccinations is controversial because of the risk of complications associated with the use of a live virus vaccine. This is true even in previously vaccinated individuals who are thought to retain partial immunity to smallpox. In a small number of people the vaccinia virus itself causes significant illness, and about 2 people in a million vaccinated will die of disseminated

vaccinia. The decision to be vaccinated depends on balancing the risk of vaccination complications against the unknown risk of being exposed to smallpox.

A confounding variable is that vaccinated healthcare workers will for weeks be at risk of spreading vaccinia virus to patients putting immuno-compromised patients at risk of fatal disseminated vaccinia.

Transfusion-transmitted vaccinia can be a devastating illness in recipients. Therefore, recently vaccinated donors will be deferred for 56 days. If the entire population of the country is going to be vaccinated within a few weeks of the outbreak of smallpox, who will be left to donate blood?

Securing the Nation's Blood Supply

Blood banks in Florida are working with state and federal authorities to prevent blood shortages during phase 3 of the proposed vaccination program. The first step – asking donors if they've received the smallpox vaccination with 56 days – is already in place.

Blood center employees will be offered voluntary vaccination during phase 2 of the program and staff will be trained to administer the vaccine to the general public if phase 3 is ever needed. If and when phase 3 begins, vaccinations will be offered at our donor facilities to blood donors after they donate. If enough citizens join this program the blood supply will be largely unaffected by a national vaccination campaign since the normal interval between whole blood donations will run concurrently with the smallpox vaccination deferral.

More information on this issue can be found at: <http://www.fda.gov/cber/vaccine/smallpox.htm>

- ✓ If you want to receive this newsletter by email, just signup at our website, www.cbcsf.org, and you will be added to our mailing list.
- ✓ Did you know that you can schedule a blood donation appointment online? Visit our website and click on *Locations* and then *Make An Appointment* from the left-hand side menu.
- ✓ Did you know that you can now check your next eligibility donation date online when you get your cholesterol level screening results?

Our May newsletter will feature the biology of the West Nile Virus and information regarding testing the blood supply for this virus, which is slated to begin July 1, 2003.

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