

Department of Health and Family Services
State of Wisconsin

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

WISCONSIN ORDERS SMALLPOX VACCINE

(MADISON), February 12, 2003) ---Department of Health and Family Services Secretary Helene Nelson announced today that Wisconsin has ordered 2,500 doses of smallpox vaccine for phase one of the state's smallpox vaccination plan.

"So far nearly, 1,800 hospital and public health workers have volunteered to be vaccinated," Nelson said. She said 67 hospitals and 66 local public health departments statewide are expected to participate in this first phase of vaccinations.

"Based on these numbers, we are confident we will have adequate coverage in every region of the state," she said.

According to Herb Bostrom, Director of the Bureau of Communicable Diseases in the Division of Public Health, the volunteers will form preparedness teams that will provide care and treatment for people suspected of having smallpox. "They will also investigate potential cases of the disease in case of smallpox attack," Bostrom said.

Bostrom added that some 75 Division of Public Health staff will receive training to run smallpox vaccination clinics, and about a third of those plan to be vaccinated. At the vaccination clinics, volunteers will be thoroughly screened and educated about the side effects and contraindications for the vaccine.

Starting the week of March 3rd, 25 vaccination clinics will be conducted around the state to vaccinate the volunteer preparedness teams. The first round of clinics is expected to take about two weeks.

Because smallpox vaccine can, in rare cases, produce severe and even deadly reactions, the state plan calls for careful monitoring for adverse reactions.

"Those health care volunteers will report daily at their workplace for a formal check of their vaccination site," Bostrom said. "Each vaccinee will keep a diary to track any reactions to the vaccine."

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Bostrom noted that the check also assures that the worker has the vaccination site properly covered to greatly reduce the risk of accidentally transferring virus to another person. The smallpox vaccine contains the live vaccinia virus; it does not contain smallpox virus and cannot cause or spread smallpox disease.

While the public is not included in the first phase of vaccination, state officials say they are prepared to expand the vaccination program in the event of a smallpox attack.

“Wisconsin has a plan in place to provide vaccinations if a smallpox attack does occur. People would still have time to be vaccinated,” Bostrom said.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has requested vaccination plans from all states as a part of a national effort to prepare the nation for possible terrorist activities.

“It is difficult to believe smallpox would be used as a weapon,” Bostrom said. “But in this day and age, we have to prepare for the worst.”

Smallpox is a serious, contagious and sometimes fatal infectious disease. The last case of smallpox in the United States occurred in 1949, and the U.S. stopped routine smallpox vaccination in 1972 because the risks of the vaccine were greater than the risk of smallpox disease. The last naturally occurring case of smallpox in the world occurred in Somalia in 1977. The disease was declared eradicated worldwide in 1980.

For more information on smallpox vaccination or smallpox disease, contact your local health department, visit the CDC website at <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/smallpox> or call the CDC Hotline at 888-246-2675 (En Espanol 888-246-2857 or TTY 866-874-2646.)