

# **Smallpox** Clinical Description & Recommendations for a Vaccination Program

## **Smallpox Clinic Communications**

Communication is a crucial component for your clinic operation. Plans should be established in advance on how communication will occur both internally and externally.

Internal communication includes not only how staff will communicate with each other but also how staff will communicate with the arriving patients.

You should establish a discreet method of staff communication to ensure workers can be quickly notified about any number of potential problems in the clinic such as security violations or abnormal patient reactions to the vaccination. The use of code words may help communicate messages to the appropriate staff members without generating undue anxiety among patients. Announcements within the clinic may utilize a fixed public address system in the facility, a mobile system such as a handheld loudspeaker, or runners to pass written or verbal messages to workers or patients. Regardless of the delivery medium used, redundancy must be included in your planning. Always maintain a back-up system.

The issue of redundancy is particularly important with external communication. External communication includes how the clinic will communicate with suppliers, other clinics, key response organizations, and with the general public. Much of the external communication needs will be met through the use of telephones, cell phones or radios. Regardless of the equipment used there are three items to consider. First, you must ensure that clinic staff are designated to accomplish anticipated external communications. Second, that they are familiar with the equipment being used. And third that they understand with whom and what they will typically communicate.

One of the greatest challenges you may encounter is how to effectively interact with the mass media to deliver accurate and timely information to the public. Your success will be determined by the spokesperson designated to represent your clinic. In advance, you must identify an individual that is comfortable with public speaking, at ease in front of a camera, and knowledgeable of the clinic operations and the overall situation. They must be able to present themselves confidently and credibly. It is also important that a back-up spokesperson is designated and available. These individuals must be familiar with basic risk communication principles and be capable of maintaining a sense of calm and caring

under stressful or hostile circumstances. Since one person cannot be expected to maintain an in-depth knowledge on every facet of the vaccination effort, additional technical experts should also be identified in advance. If a question is raised that is beyond the spokesperson's level of expertise in a given area, they should defer those questions until they have had an opportunity to consult with the designated technical advisors.

Finally, it is important to emphasize to all clinic staff that they should not speak to the media. All workers should know the spokesperson's name and refer all media inquiries to the designated spokesperson. This will reduce the possibility of sharing conflicting or inaccurate information and ensure consistent messages are being shared with the public.