

Center for

Infectious Disease Research & Policy

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Smallpox vaccination count doubles with boost from Florida

Feb 12, 2003 (CIDRAP News) – The count of public health workers vaccinated against smallpox has more than doubled in the past few days, with a boost from a Florida program in which 503 people were vaccinated yesterday.

The Florida Department of Health said 503 of its staff members were inoculated as the state's campaign was launched yesterday. One of them had "a mild allergic reaction" to the vaccine and was doing well after treatment, the department reported in a news release.

Elsewhere, 1,043 health workers in 18 other states and one urban county (Los Angeles) had been vaccinated as of yesterday, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). With the Florida count, the national total of vaccinations topped 1,500, more than double the 687 reported by the CDC Feb 6.

Florida has vaccinated the most workers by far. Tennessee was second with 248, followed by Nebraska with 137, according to the CDC figures. The inoculations are part of a federal program to vaccinate up to 500,000 public health and healthcare workers who would serve on volunteer smallpox response teams in case of an outbreak. Launched Jan 24, the campaign has been off to a slow start because of workers' concerns about vaccine side effects and compensation for potential associated medical expenses and lost wages.

The Florida worker's allergic reaction is apparently the first adverse event reported in the civilian vaccination campaign. John O. Agwunobi, MD, secretary of the Florida Department of Health, said in the news release, "I am happy to report that our colleague who suffered a mild allergic reaction to the vaccine is doing fine and ready for a rapid return to normal activities." The department did not name the person or give details about the reaction.

A chart on the CDC Web site showed no significant (moderate to severe, severe, or life-threatening) adverse events in the civilian vaccination program so far. Also, the agency reported no transmission of vaccinia virus from vaccinees to others.

The Department of Defense (DoD) has vaccinated tens of thousands of troops since President Bush announced the immunization plan Dec 13. DoD reported Jan 31 that one soldier had generalized vaccinia and a second had encephalitis that may have been triggered by the vaccine. Both men were reported to be doing well.

The CDC had shipped 265,100 doses of smallpox vaccine to 45 states and four county and city health departments as of yesterday, according to figures on the agency Web site.

In other developments, two new polls indicated that slightly more than half of adult Americans would get a smallpox shot if it were available. A Gallup poll found that 53% of respondents were willing to

be immunized, while an Associated Press poll put the count at 54%, according to Reuters and AP reports.

The Gallup poll showed that nearly two thirds of respondents were worried about the threat of a smallpox attack, but the AP poll put the proportion of worried people somewhat lower at 54%.

In the Gallup poll, people were asked their opinion about the growing number of hospitals around the country that are refusing to taking part in the first phase of the vaccination program. Fifty-three percent of respondents supported those hospitals' decisions, while 39% did not, according to Reuters Health.

The AP poll involved 1,002 adults and was conducted between Jan 31 and Feb 4; the Gallup organization surveyed 1,002 adults from Jan 23 to 25. Both polls had a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 3 percentage points.

See also:

CDC vaccination tally

<http://www.cdc.gov/od/oc/media/smpxrprt.htm>

Florida Department of Health news release on smallpox vaccinations

<http://www.doh.state.fl.us/Communications/office/pressreleases/2003/02.11.03VaccinationUpdate.doc>

CDC vaccine shipment numbers

<http://www.cdc.gov/od/oc/media/smallpox.htm>

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