



News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Wednesday, Mar. 5, 2003

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HHS PROPOSES SMALLPOX VACCINATION COMPENSATION PLAN

HHS Secretary Tommy G. Thompson today proposed a plan to create a smallpox vaccination compensation program to provide benefits to public health and medical response team members who are injured as a result of receiving the smallpox vaccine. It is based on a similar compensation package that is currently available to police officers and firefighters.

In December, President Bush announced a plan for public health and medical response teams to be vaccinated voluntarily against smallpox as part of an overall effort to better prepare the nation against terrorism. Smallpox is a disease that is very contagious and can spread rapidly, so it is important to have medical response teams prepared to respond and protect the American people should an outbreak occur.

"I commend all of the public health and medical response team members who have already volunteered to be vaccinated against smallpox so we as a nation will be better prepared to protect the public," Secretary Thompson said. "A smallpox release is possible and we therefore must prepare by offering vaccine to those most likely to respond. By preparing our emergency responders and giving them assistance with this compensation program, we are better able to protect the American people, which is our highest priority."

"We are asking these health professionals to perform a vital public duty, so we are proposing to provide them the same sort of benefits that we provide our public safety officers when they are injured on the job," said Dr. Julie Gerberding, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). "We are truly grateful for their commitment and willingness to take part in this vital program."

The proposed compensation program - which the department will continue to work with Congress on addressing - includes four elements similar to the benefits package currently available to police officers and firefighters. Under the Public Safety Officers Benefit (PSOB) program, administered by the Department of Justice, the federal government currently pays a \$262,100 death and a \$262,100 permanent and total disability benefit to police officers and firefighters. State and local governments provide short-term disability benefits and health care benefits.

The benefits package would be administered by HHS and be retroactive to cover those who already have been vaccinated under the program. The four elements of the plan include:

Permanent and total disability benefit: HHS would create a benefit modeled on the PSOB to offer a \$262,100 permanent and total disability benefit for disability caused by the administration of the vaccine. This benefit would be paid regardless of other death benefits available to the

individual (except the approximately one-third of first responders who are already covered by the PSOB).

Death benefit: HHS would create a benefit modeled on the PSOB to offer a \$262,100 death benefit for deaths caused by administration of the vaccine. This benefit would be paid regardless of other death benefits available to the individual (except the approximately one-third of first responders who are already covered by the PSOB).

Temporary or partial disability benefit: HHS would compensate individuals for two-thirds of lost wages after the fifth day from work, up to a maximum of \$50,000. This benefit would be secondary to any workers compensation or disability insurance benefits that might be available to the individual.

Health care benefit: HHS would compensate individuals for their reasonable out-of-pocket medical expenses for other than minor injuries. This benefit would be secondary to any health insurance benefit that might be available to the individual.

Additionally, HHS would provide compensation to third parties who contract vaccinia from public health and medical response team workers who have been vaccinated.

HHS and CDC are working with state and local governments to vaccinate health care workers and other crucial personnel - as part of Smallpox Response Teams - to volunteer to receive the smallpox vaccine. All states have submitted smallpox response plans and as of March 4, 45 jurisdictions have vaccinated nearly 12,404 individuals - up from 7,354 one week earlier and 4,213 two weeks ago.

Pre-attack vaccination of these teams will allow them to vaccinate the American public in the event of an attack. If there is a release of smallpox, we will immediately make vaccine available to the general public. HHS currently has enough unlicensed vaccine to protect every American. HHS will have enough licensed vaccine sometime in 2004.

"We do not, however, recommend that the general public get the vaccine at this time because the risk of the vaccine outweighs the risk of a potential exposure to smallpox," Secretary Thompson said. This compensation plan does not cover the general public, as it is not recommended that they receive the vaccine.

The existing smallpox vaccine is very effective in preventing the disease, but it carries a risk of serious health consequences - including death in 1 or 2 out of every 1 million people vaccinated. Between 14 and 52 out of every 1 million may experience potentially life-threatening reactions when given the existing smallpox vaccine.

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Last Revised: March 5, 2003

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