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**TEXAS NURSES ASSOCIATION URGES CAUTION FOR TEXAS  
NURSES VOLUNTEERING FOR SMALLPOX VACCINE**

*TNA cites too many unknown health and employment implications for nurses, and safety concerns for patients.*

**Austin, TX - January 31, 2003** - The Texas Nurses Association (TNA) is advising registered nurses across the state to closely evaluate and carefully weigh both known risks and well-being implications for nurses and patients before volunteering to participate in the public smallpox vaccination program in Texas. Phase I of the national smallpox vaccination program began January 24, 2003.

The unanimous decision to not recommend to nurses that they participate in Phase I of the vaccination program was reached by the TNA Board of Directors during a meeting held recently in Austin. Board members who represent a statewide membership of registered nurses agreed unanimously that they could not recommend participation before many of the outstanding safety issues for nurses were addressed.

Nurses are among approximately 40,000 health care and public health workers across Texas (and 500,000 nationally) who are being targeted for first-phase vaccinations, and among 10 million first responders selected for a second phase of vaccines. Registered nurses comprise a large percentage of both groups, which include:

- Hospital staff, about 15% of which will provide direct care to a patient with smallpox.
- Public health staff, who will vaccinate individuals who will be part of a response team or staff who will need to vaccinate others.

"There are certainly plenty of concerns surrounding smallpox vaccinations," stressed Lynn Wieck, PhD, RN, president of Texas Nurses Association. "We urge all health care professionals to get the facts, ask questions, determine their own risk factors, and make an informed decision before proceeding with the vaccine," she cautioned.

The Texas Nurses Association is following the path of its national association - the American Nurses Association (ANA) - in striving to get answers for nurses that will help them make informed decisions about whether or not they should choose to receive the vaccine. Both TNA and ANA believe the following issues must be satisfactorily addressed before nurses can move forward with their decisions:

- Potential transmission of the vaccinia virus to patients and family members;

- Right of coverage of medical costs associated with receiving the vaccine;
- Utilization of safer bifurcated needles;
- Critical need to establish an adequate pre-screening and education program;
- Maintenance of sufficient staffing during the voluntary, pre-event vaccination program;
- Compensation for lost time at work due to adverse effects of the vaccination program.

The Texas Nurses Association will be notifying RNs, public health officials, hospitals and other health care stakeholders about its decision to promote caution. RNs are encouraged to contact TNA regarding any concerns — 512.452.0645.

*The Texas Nurses Association is a professional organization of registered nurses throughout Texas, and the only Texas affiliate of the American Nurses Association. Texas Nurses Association seeks to promote excellence in nursing by helping nurses achieve quality patient care through high standards of practice, legislative involvement and public policy advocacy.*