FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 14, 2003

OPERATION VACCINATE FLORIDA UPDATE
-- 780 individuals in our state vaccinated as of 12 a.m. EST February 14--

TALLAHASSEE - Officials from the Florida Department of Health (DOH) today reported that as of 12 a.m. on February 14, 780 individuals, comprising employees from DOH and hospitals throughout various parts of the state, have been vaccinated. As reported earlier in the week, one individual had a mild allergic reaction to the vaccine, was treated and released, and has recovered from the reaction.

“We have had a very productive week, and are right on track to reach our goal of building a statewide smallpox response team,” said DOH Secretary John O. Agwunobi, M.D., M.B.A. “Most importantly, our colleague who suffered a mild allergic reaction to the vaccine appears to have recovered from the reaction. While we have seen no severe adverse reactions to the vaccine so far, there are potential risks. Protecting ourselves from a possible smallpox attack and the resulting deaths makes it imperative for us to take those risks.”

This week’s vaccinations marked the start of Stage 1 of Operation Vaccinate Florida. During this stage, smallpox vaccinations will be provided to smallpox response teams throughout the state. The first step will be to create vaccination teams drawn principally from Florida Department of Health (DOH) public health staff. This will be the focus of the first two weeks of Operation Vaccinate Florida. Once these DOH vaccination teams have been established, they will vaccinate larger groups over the remainder of Stage 1. These groups are drawn from hospitals throughout the state. Hospitals that participate will be better prepared in the event of an outbreak. This first stage of smallpox vaccinations is expected to last approximately 30 to 60 days.

Vaccination is done with a live virus called “vaccinia” and is widely effective in giving immunity against smallpox. Vaccinia is not smallpox itself and there is no risk of reintroducing smallpox this way. There are, however, risks associated with vaccination, affecting approximately 50 people of every million vaccinated. To mitigate risks, a number of measures are in place, including a detailed screening of vaccination candidates.

DOH will hold a teleconference from 2 –2:30 p.m. EST on Monday, February 17 to provide an update on Operation Vaccinate Florida. The number is 800-351-4872, security code 22393.

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