

News



City of St. Louis Department of Health

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St. Louis Awarded First Responder Vaccination Pilot Program

The safety and protection of civilian first responders has been made a top priority with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) adoption of the First Responder Vaccine Initiative (FRVI). DHS's Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction Office launched this initiative out of its commitment to improving the nation's ability to detect and protect against biological terrorism such as anthrax attacks. Per DHS Chief Medical Officer Duane Caneva, MD, "DHS is working with our state and local public health partners to build capacity and capability to ensure an integrated response to health security threats." This initiative focuses on "protecting the many by protecting the few," during an anthrax event. Personnel from law enforcement, fire and rescue, Hazmat, emergency rooms, public health and safety, and disaster preparedness and response are at an increased risk of exposure to this biological agent as response efforts kick off. FRVI has been developed to reduce these risks and strengthen responder preparedness and protection by providing them with pre-event voluntary anthrax vaccinations.

"Pre-event anthrax vaccination for first responders will enhance protection for those at most risk of exposure to anthrax during an attack. This will strengthen our ability to prevent morbidity and mortality from disease and ensure sufficient capacity to respond rapidly and effectively," said Dr. Thomas Zink, Senior Medical Advisor to City of St. Louis Mayor Lyda Krewson.

The St. Louis metropolitan area is one of two areas in the country selected to conduct a FRVI pilot project. The St. Louis pilot - Project PREPARE (Program to Ready Emergency Personnel for an Anthrax Event) will be co-managed by the St. Louis city and county health departments and Washington University School of Medicine. City of St. Louis Director of Health Dr. Fredrick Echols and Dr. Stacey House, Director of Emergency Care Research Core at Washington University School of Medicine, Department of Emergency Medicine will spearhead the management efforts for the pilot.

"Anthrax is one of the most likely biological agents to be used by a terrorist because anthrax spores can easily be found in nature, can be produced in a lab, and can last in the environment for a long time," said City of St. Louis Health Director, Dr. Fredrick Echols. "It's a good weapon because it only takes a small amount to infect a large number of people and it can be released without anyone knowing since the spores are microscopic and cannot be seen, smelled, or tasted."

Per Dr. House, "We've had a tremendous response in the first responder community to this effort. The Missouri Fraternal Order of Police, the Missouri Association of Fire Fighters, and the St. Louis Area Police Chiefs Association have stated support for Project PREPARE. So far, sixty-five fire departments, law enforcement agencies, emergency medical services, and emergency departments in St. Louis City and County have agreed to participate in Project PREPARE's anthrax education and vaccination program."

The vaccine for the pilot will come from the nation's Strategic National Stockpile, a national repository of antibiotics, vaccines, chemical antidotes, antitoxins, and other critical medical supplies stored for national emergencies.

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