

Smallpox Vaccine: Side Effects Raise Concern

Half of Americans say they'd get a smallpox shot if one were available, but the other half are dubious, given the vaccine's potential side effects – the same reason the Centers for Disease Control doesn't plan mass vaccinations.

Fifty percent in this ABC News poll say they'd get a smallpox shot; 41 percent say they'd decline and the rest are unsure. Respondents were given pro and con arguments – on one hand, protection against possible bioterrorism; on the other, the risk of the vaccine itself.

Health experts say the vaccine could kill one in 500,000 people and make one in 150,000 seriously ill. As the poll posed it, "Some people say all Americans should be vaccinated against smallpox to protect them in case terrorists try to spread the disease. Others say the chance that terrorists could get a hold of smallpox is too slight to justify the risk of the vaccine itself."

Groups most likely to say they'd decline the shot include young adults (under age 35) and political independents. Those most likely to say they'd get a smallpox shot include middle-aged people, Southerners and Democrats.

	Get a smallpox shot?	
	Yes	No
All	50%	41
Age 18-34	43	51
Age 55-64	58	33
Southerners	56	36
Midwesterners	43	48
Democrats	56	37
Republicans	52	39
Independents	44	50

Federal authorities last week said they would stockpile the vaccine, announcing a \$428 million contract to buy 155 million doses, but would not undertake "indiscriminate mass vaccination campaigns." The CDC's Smallpox Response Plan says "ring vaccination" – identifying and vaccinating people with possible exposure – is preferable, given factors including the vaccine's risks. It works even if administered a few days after exposure.

“The reason not to just immunize everyone has to do with the reactogenicity of the vaccine,” says John D. Clements, an immunologist at Tulane University School of Medicine. “If everyone were immunized, based on our previous experience with this vaccine, you would expect to see 300 to 600 deaths and approximately 2,000 cases of encephalitis. This vaccine has more potentially deadly side effects than any vaccine currently in use. That's why the decision was made to stop using it.”

METHODOLOGY - This ABC News.com survey was conducted by telephone November 28-Dec. 2, 2001, among a random national sample of 1,022 adults. The results have a three-point error margin. Sampling, data collection and tabulation by TNS Intersearch of Horsham, Pa.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com on the Internet at:

<http://www.abcnews.com/sections/us/PollVault/PollVault.html>

Media Contact: Lauren Kapp, (212) 456-2478, lauren.kapp@abc.com

Here are the full results:

117. There's a vaccine that would protect people from smallpox, but the vaccine itself can kill a small number of the people who get it - about one out of every 500-thousand - and make another one out of 150-thousand seriously ill. Some people say all Americans should be vaccinated against smallpox to protect them in case terrorists try to spread the disease. Others say the chance that terrorists could get a hold of smallpox is too slight to justify the risk of the vaccine itself. If a smallpox vaccine became available, would you yourself get the shot, or not?

	Would	Would not	No opin.
12/2/01	50	41	9