



1100 17TH STREET, NW, 2ND FLOOR
WASHINGTON, DC 20036
(202) 783-5550
(202) 783-1583 FAX
WWW.NACCHO.ORG

NATIONAL
ASSOCIATION OF
COUNTY & CITY
HEALTH OFFICIALS

Statement of the National Association of County & City Health Officials Concerning Compensation for Adverse Effects of Countermeasures

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) represents the nearly 3000 local health departments whose workers serve on the front lines when disease outbreaks occur. Under the President's National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza, the National Vaccine Advisory Committee and the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices have recommended that public health workers, alongside health care workers who have direct patient contact or who are engaged in providing vaccinations, receive high priority for any available vaccine in the event of an influenza pandemic, second only to persons engaged in vaccine manufacturing. This priority recognizes the essential responsibilities of public health workers in implementing their community's pandemic response plans.

The nation has now had two experiences, well-remembered by many in the public health field, in which some persons who accepted vaccines in the public interest suffered previously unpredicted adverse medical consequences. This occurred during the swine flu episode in 1976 and more recently during an effort to vaccinate first responders against smallpox that began in 2002. In both instances, Congress ultimately recognized a public obligation to provide compensation to persons who suffered adverse effects from the vaccines.

The same justification for a public compensation program exists for future countermeasures against serious outbreaks of disease, whether they occur naturally, as would pandemic influenza, or result from an intentional act of biological terrorism. It is in the public's interest that there be no economic deterrent to acceptance of new or experimental vaccines and drugs by persons who must risk exposure to communicable diseases in order to do their jobs of caring for and protecting others.

Accordingly, we urge Congress to enact a compensation program that would include coverage of public health and health care workers injured by countermeasures as an integral component of a comprehensive strategy to encourage the development, manufacture, distribution and use of such countermeasures.

November 2005