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New Research Group to Focus on Deadly Smallpox Vaccination Complication

The National Eczema Association for Science and Education conducted a media campaign during the Winter/Spring of 2003 urging anyone who currently has or has ever suffered from atopic dermatitis/eczema not to receive the smallpox vaccination unless they have been exposed to smallpox, because of the heightened risk of eczema vaccinatum (EV). This risk came to public attention during the push to vaccinate people in the United States in anticipation of use of the smallpox virus by terrorists.

Eczema Vaccinatum is a severe and potentially deadly complication of smallpox immunization experienced by atopic dermatitis/eczema patients. If left untreated, EV can kill between 1 to 6 percent of those affected. In children younger than 2 years of age, EV has been estimated to kill up to 30 percent.

On May 19, 2004, the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) launched a new nationwide research group to focus specifically on this risk. This group, the Atopic Dermatitis and Vaccinia Network (ADV N), represents an important step toward the goal of helping to protect everyone against the smallpox virus without the risk of life-threatening complications. The ADV N is comprised of three integrated components: a Clinical Studies Consortium, an Animal Studies Consortium, and a Statistical and Data Coordinating Center.

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The National Eczema Association for Science and Education (NEASE) is proud to announce that four of the six members selected as Principal Investigators for the Clinical Studies Consortium are members of the NEASE Scientific Advisory Committee. Included in this research group are: Lisa Beck, MD, of Johns Hopkins Asthma and Allergy Center; Richard Gallo, MD, PhD., of the University of California at San Diego; Jon Hanifin, MD, of the Oregon Health and Science University; and Donald Leung, MD, PhD., of the National Jewish Medical and Research Center.

Drs. Beck and Hanifin will be in Arlington, VA for the Inaugural Patient Conference of the National Eczema Association for Science and Education July 16-18, 2004 (see NR-10-2004). Atopic dermatitis/eczema, which affects an estimated 30 million Americans, causes an itchy red, scaly, rash that often comes and goes. If the live virus from the vaccine site gets into broken skin, it can cause a rash in that area. Most people recover from the rash with treatment, but in those with atopic dermatitis/eczema it can be quite severe, sometimes leading to scarring or even death.

The mission of the National Eczema Association for Science and Education is to work to improve the health and the quality of life of all persons living with atopic dermatitis/eczema, providing emotional support, information, and resources to those who have the disease as well as their loved ones, while raising public awareness of the disease.

To learn more about the NEASE organization and the upcoming Inaugural Patient Conference, please contact the National Eczema Association for Science and Education office at 800-818-7546 in San Rafael, CA, or visit the NEASE Web site at www.nationaleczema.org.

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