



National Funeral Directors Association
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2011 POLICY

INCLUDE FUNERAL SERVICE PERSONNEL AS A PRIORITY GROUP ELIGIBLE FOR INOCULATION AGAINST ANY AND ALL INFECTIOUS/CONTAGIOUS DISEASES OR BIOLOGIC AGENTS

NFDA Position

Funeral service personnel should be included as a priority group eligible for voluntary inoculation against any and all infectious/contagious diseases or biologic agents.

Background

In late 2002, the U.S. initiated a voluntary campaign to vaccinate as many as 10.5 million health and public safety personnel as a precaution against a bio-terrorist attack with smallpox. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the Public Health Service announced that funeral directors would not be included in this initial group eligible for inoculation even though the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) advises that smallpox can be spread through contact with contaminated objects such as bedding or clothing...That was then....this is now!

Discussion

The federal government has long recognized the important role of funeral directors in mass disaster situations by including them on the Disaster Mortuary Teams (D-MORT) that assist the local Medical Examiner at the scene with victim identification, forensic and medical services, and related functions as well as the use by local medical examiners and coroners of “volunteer” funeral directors supplied by our state associations at disaster scenes. This was clearly evidenced by the invaluable service funeral directors provided in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks as well as the devastating hurricanes along the Gulf Coast. Any outbreak of an infectious/contagious disease in the U.S., whether a deliberate act of terrorism or from natural causes, is likely to be unpredictable.

Infections and deaths resulting from exposure to a biologic agent or virus are likely to occur in large numbers outside the containment area such as in traditional medical facilities, morgues and related facilities. Most of these will be “unattended” deaths where the cause is not readily apparent.

Under these circumstances, funeral directors are likely to come into contact with infected bodies and contaminated surroundings. The expeditious and proper handling of human remains, and the protection of those who perform this function, will be as important in isolating and stopping the outbreak as is the treatment of the victims. In this regard, NFDA continues to meet with key senior officials at the White House and the Departments of Health and Human Services and

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Homeland Security to discuss the importance of funeral service and the resources they bring to the table in any mass disaster situation and the need to insure that they are included in any national response plan to guarantee that they are among the first vaccinated and otherwise protected from infection so that they can carry out their critical function in these types of situations. This is particularly true during a potential avian flu pandemic or other similar outbreak. In that regard, NFDA has been successful in convincing the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to include funeral service personnel in one of the top two tiers for avian flu vaccinations. We will continue to work with CDC and other federal and state agencies to reinforce the importance of ensuring a vibrant funeral service workforce during any type of biologic or infectious disease outbreak not just an avian flu pandemic.

NFDA Governance History:

2003: Committee Action 1/23/03; Policy Board Action 3/24/03

2004: Committee Action 1/26/04; Policy Board Action 3/15/04

2005: Committee Action 1/18/05; Policy Board Action 3/7/05

2006: Committee Action 1/17/06; Policy Board Action 3/8/06

2007: Committee Action 1/16/07; Policy Board Action 3/26/07

2008: Committee Action 1/14/08; Policy Board Action 3/10/08

2009: Committee Action 1/29/09; Policy Board Action 3/30/09

2010: Committee Action 1/20/10; Policy Board Action 3/08/10

2011: Committee Action 1/27/11; Policy Board Action 3/09/11

Attest: NFDA Policy Board (original resolution) Date: March 24, 2003 File Code: RES073/Policybd

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