Response to Smallpox Vaccine in Persons Immunized in the Distant Past

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PUBLIC HEALTH STRATEGIES TO thwart potential bioterrorism threats using smallpox are needed. In a previous study, vaccinia-naive participants given undiluted smallpox vaccine (10^8 pfu/mL of the New York City Board of Health strain) were successfully vaccinated with rates of 97.2%. Participants who were given vaccine diluted to a ratio of 1:5 (10^7.2 pfu/mL) had successful vaccination rates of 99.1%, and participants given vaccine diluted to a ratio of 1:10 (10^7.0 pfu/mL) had successful vaccination rates of 97.1%. A 1970 article by Lane et al reported a rate of success with revaccination in 135 (96%) of 161 adults when undiluted vaccine titered at 10^8 pfu/mL and a single pointed needle was used. Significantly more successful revaccination occurs after longer intervals since previous vaccination. Because smallpox vaccine has not been widely used in the United States since 1972, it was anticipated that many previously vaccinated persons would exhibit a major reaction to the smallpox vaccine.

The purpose of this study was to characterize a strategy of vaccination against smallpox with undiluted vaccine or a reduced dose (dilution of 1:3.2, 1:10, or 1:32), followed by revaccination with the same dose if required, in volunteers aged 32 to 60 years with a history of previous smallpox vaccination in the distant past. The data yielded will guide design of a larger trial to more precisely define successful vaccination rates and adverse events in previously vaccinated (non-naive) participants.

METHODS
The study was a randomized, single-blind trial, which was conducted at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Vaccine and Treatment Evaluation Unit at Saint Louis University, St Louis, Mo. Eighty non-naive participants, aged 32 to 60 years, were randomized in a single-blinded study to receive either undiluted or diluted (1:3.2, 1:10, or 1:32) doses of smallpox vaccine. A comparison group, aged 18 to 31 years, of vaccinia-naive participants received undiluted vaccine. Participants were enrolled between April 1 and May 15, 2002, at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Vaccine and Treatment Evaluation Unit at Saint Louis University, St Louis, Mo.

Context There is renewed interest in use of smallpox vaccine due to the potential for a bioterrorist attack. This would involve vaccinating health care workers who were previously vaccinated.

Objective To evaluate the use of diluted vaccinia virus in vaccination of previously vaccinated (non-naive) participants.

Design, Setting, and Participants Eighty non-naive participants, aged 32 to 60 years, were randomized in a single-blinded study to receive either undiluted or diluted (1:3.2, 1:10, or 1:32) doses of smallpox vaccine. A comparison group, aged 18 to 31 years, of vaccinia-naive participants received undiluted vaccine. Participants were enrolled between April 1 and May 15, 2002, at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Vaccine and Treatment Evaluation Unit at Saint Louis University, St Louis, Mo.

Intervention Smallpox vaccine was administered by scarification using 15 skin punctures in the deltoid region of the arm.

Main Outcome Measures Presence of a major reaction, defined as a vesicular or purulent lesion or area of palpable induration surrounding a central lesion following vaccination, and measures of viral shedding and antibody titers.

Results Initial vaccination resulted in a major reaction in 64 of 80 non-naive participants. Ninety-five percent of non-naive participants had major reactions in the undiluted group, 90% in the 1:3.2 dilution group, 81% in the 1:10 dilution group, and 52.6% in the 1:32 dilution group. All (n=10) of the vaccinia-naive participants had major reactions. Compared with vaccinia-naive participants, non-naive participants had significantly smaller skin lesions (P=.04) and significantly less incidence of fever (P=.02). Preexisting antibody was present in 76 of 80 non-naive participants. Antibody responses were significantly higher and occurred more rapidly in the non-naive participants compared with the vaccinia-naive participants (P=.002 for day 28 and P=.003 for 6 months). Vaccinia-naive participants shed virus from the vaccination site 2 to 6 days longer and had significantly higher peak mean viral titers when compared with the non-naive participants (P=.002).

Conclusions Previously vaccinated persons can be successfully revaccinated with diluted (≤1:10) smallpox vaccine. Fewer adverse reactions were observed in this study of non-naive participants when compared with events in vaccinia-naive participants, which may be due to immunologic memory.

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ration with 10% acetone in alcohol and pants had prescarification skin preparation. Vaccinia-naive. Thirty-four participants, including those who were vaccinated with the same dose on day 7 or 8.

Fifteen skin punctures using a bifurcated needle were used to vaccinate all participants at each of the dose levels. The comparison group consisted of individuals who were otherwise healthy and between the ages of 18 and 31 years, who had never received a smallpox vaccination (vaccinia-naive). This group received undiluted vaccine to compare maximal expected clinical and immunologic responses."

Individuals were excluded if they had known allergies to any component of vaccine, vaccinia immunoglobulin, cidofovir, or probenecid, or had met other previously reported exclusion criteria.

The primary end point was the rate of major reaction (vesicular or pustular lesion or an area of definite palpable induration or congestion surrounding a central lesion which may be a crust or ulcer). This reaction indicates that virus multiplication has most likely taken place and that the revaccination is successful.

The titer in each group is the geometric mean titer of all vials of vaccine prepared for use in the study.

A major reaction is a vesicular or pustular lesion or an area of definite palpable induration or congestion surrounding a central lesion which may be a crust or ulcer. This reaction indicates that virus multiplication has most likely taken place and that the revaccination is successful. Success was defined at 6 to 8 days after intradermal inoculation with a bifurcated needle.

**Table 1. Rate of Success of Initial and Repeated Smallpox Vaccination**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vaccine Dilution</th>
<th>Titer*</th>
<th>No. of Participants</th>
<th>Initial Vaccination Successful†</th>
<th>Initial or Repeated Vaccination Successful‡</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Undiluted</strong></td>
<td>$10^7.5$ pfu/mL</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>95.0 (75-100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dilution ratio</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:3.2</td>
<td>$10^6.5$ pfu/mL</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>81.0 (58-95)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:10</td>
<td>$10^6.3$ pfu/mL</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>52.6 (29-76)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:32</td>
<td>$10^6.0$ pfu/mL</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100 (69-100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Participants

**Vaccinia-Naive Participants (n = 10)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vaccine Dilution</th>
<th>Titer*</th>
<th>No. of Participants</th>
<th>Initial Vaccination Successful†</th>
<th>Initial or Repeated Vaccination Successful‡</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Undiluted</strong></td>
<td>$10^7.0$ pfu/mL</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100 (69-100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Abbreviations: CI, confidence interval; pfu, plaque-forming unit.

# Discussion

The primary end point was the rate of major reaction (vesicular or pustular lesion or an area of definite palpable induration or congestion surrounding a central lesion which may be a crust or ulcer). Six to 8 days after vaccination at each of the dose levels, fifteen skin punctures using a bifurcated needle were used to vaccinate all participants, including those who were vaccinia-naive. Thirty-four participants had skin preparation with 10% acetone in alcohol and 56 participants had skin preparation with 100% acetone. Overall, the successful vaccination rate difference was 9.2% with 100% acetone having the larger value. The vaccination site was covered with gauze and a semipermeable adhesive dressing. The dressings were changed every 3 to 5 days until the lesion scabbed sufficiently. Participants not manifesting a major reaction after the first vaccination were revaccinated with the same dilution 7 or 8 days after the initial vaccination in an attempt to optimize the rate of major reactions following revaccination.

The smallpox vaccine (New York City Board of Health strain, Dryvax, Wyeth Laboratories, Marietta, Pa; lot number 4008284) was provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The vaccine is part of the remaining stock of the vaccine used during the smallpox eradication campaign. All current lots were manufactured between 1974 and 1981. Reformulated vaccine diluent (lot number 1468-1A), which was produced by Chesapeake Biological Laboratories in Baltimore, Md, contained 50% glycerin and 0.21% phenol in sterile water. Unlike the original diluent, the reformulated vaccine did not contain brilliant green dye.

Undiluted (1:3.2) and diluted (1:10) vaccine was prepared by reconstituting vaccinia directly in the vials, which was stored at 2°C to 8°C for up to 56 days after reconstitution. The 1:32 dilution was prepared fresh on each day by diluting 10-fold of the stored 1:3.2 preparation. An aliquot from each vial of vaccine was back-titrated to verify the vaccinia plaque-forming units per milliliter contained in each dilution.

Samples for virus quantitation were obtained from each person with a vaccinia lesion by rolling a dry swab over the lesion once every 3 to 5 days until the lesion had scabbed and was dry. Samples were kept frozen in a dry refrigerator until titers were measured by plaque assay as described. These tests were performed on the initial vaccination only.

The kinetics of antibody response to vaccinia was determined. A modified neutralization assay was performed on serum samples collected prior to vaccination and between 3 and 5 days after vaccination, 6 and 8 days, 12 and 15 days, 26 and 30 days, and then 6 months postvaccination. Vaccinia-specific binding antibody was determined for the same serum samples by IgG enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay. The enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay procedure, modified from the method by Iacono-Connors et al., included 2-hour incubations at 37°C with the standard washing procedure between the horseradish peroxidase-conjugated antihuman IgG (Accurate Chemical, Westbury, NY) and the peroxidase substrate (ABTS; Kirkegaard and Perry, Gaithersburg, Md) steps of the procedure. Following a 30-minute incubation at room temperature, a stopping solution (1% sodium dodecyl sulfate) was added to the plates and the plates were read at a dual wavelength of 405/492 nm. Linear regression plots were determined for each sample tested and endpoint titers were determined based on a once daily cut-off of 0.30 nm.

The 95% confidence intervals for the vaccination success rates in each group were obtained using exact methods. Logistic regression modeling was used to estimate the dose effect on the success rate among the previously vaccinated participants.
was used to assess the difference in the proportion of non-naive responders, between the participants receiving undiluted vaccine and each of the 3 dilutions, and the vaccinia-naive group.

Maximum severity of reactogenicity and local symptoms within 15 days postvaccination were assessed. The results from the non-naive participants were compared with those from the vaccinia-naive participants using the Kruskal-Wallis test for continuous outcomes and the exact or asymptotic contingency table test for categorical outcomes.\textsuperscript{11} The generalized estimating equation model\textsuperscript{12} or \( t \) test were used to compare peak antibody titers between the non-naive (undiluted group and all groups combined) with the undiluted vaccinia-naive group.

**RESULTS**

Ninety participants were vaccinated. Eighty non-naive participants were randomized to receive either undiluted vaccine \((n=20)\) or a 1:3.2 \((n=20)\), 1:10 \((n=21)\), or 1:32 \((n=19)\) dilution of vaccine (TABLE 1). Ten vaccinia-naive participants were vaccinated with undiluted vaccine. Eighty-seven (97%) of the participants were vaccinated with undiluted vaccine and each of the 3 dilutions, and the vaccinia-naive group.

The initial vaccination was successful (FIGURE 1) in 64 of 80 non-naive participants (Table 1). Ninety-five percent of participants had a major reaction in the undiluted group, 90% in the 1:3.2 dilution group, 81% in the 1:10 group, and 1:32 in the 52.6% group. All 10 vaccinia-naive participants had a major reaction after initial vaccination. All 16 participants without a major reaction were revaccinated. One of 3 participants in the group receiving the 1:10 dilution had a major reaction on revaccination, which increased the success rate to 85.7%, and 3 of 10 participants in the group receiving 1:32 dilution had a major reaction on revaccination, which increased the success rate to 68.4%. The differences in success rates were not significant among the non-naive participants between the 1:3.2 dilution group and the undiluted group \((P = .50; 1\text{-sided Fisher exact test})\) or between the 1:10 dilution group and the undiluted group \((P = .18; 1\text{-sided Fisher exact test})\). The initial success rate in the 1:32 dilution group was significantly lower (52.6%) than that for the undiluted group \((95%; P = .023)\). There was no statistically significant difference in the rates of successful vaccination between non-naive participants receiving undiluted vaccine and vaccinia-naive participants \((P = .67; 1\text{-sided Fisher exact test})\).

The local signs and symptoms of vaccinia virus replication among all participants in whom the initial vaccination was successful are summarized in TABLE 2. The mean (SDs) of the maximum sizes in millimeters of the lesions within 15 days after the initial vaccination among non-naive participants with a major reaction were significantly smaller than those observed among the vaccinia-naive participants \((P = .04)\). Although not statistically significant, the mean of the maximum sizes of erythema and induration were smaller in the non-naive group. Maximum mean erythema and maximum mean induration around the vaccination site occurred earlier (between days 6 and 8 in the non-naive participants compared with the vaccinia-naive participants (between days 9 and 11).

Systemic signs and symptoms of adverse events to vaccination were compared between the 64 non-naive participants (Table 1) and the 10 vaccinia-naive participants with vaccinia skin lesions. Fever was significantly less common among the non-naive participants (6 of 64) compared with vaccinia-naive participants (6 of 10; \(P = .02\)). Other signs and symptoms of adverse events were not significantly different, but the small sample size of the non-naive participants had limited...
power to provide meaningful comparisons. Six non-naive participants had rashes described as possibly, probably, or definitely related temporally to vaccination (occurring within 14 days of vaccination).

Table 2. Local Signs and Symptoms of Vaccinia Virus Replication Among Participants After Smallpox Vaccination

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local Signs or Symptoms</th>
<th>Non-naive Participants (n = 64)</th>
<th>Vaccinia-Naive Participants (n = 10)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Time After Vaccination, d</td>
<td>3-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pustule size, mean (range), mm</td>
<td>4.9 (2-10)</td>
<td>7.6 (3-15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diameter of erythema, mean (range), mm</td>
<td>10.4 (0-40)</td>
<td>18.3 (5-60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diameter of induration, mean (range), mm</td>
<td>6.1 (0-40)</td>
<td>13.8 (0-45)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No. (%) of Participants

Underarm pain and/or swelling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Mild</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-naive</td>
<td>54 (84.4)</td>
<td>15 (23.4)</td>
<td>7 (10.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaccinia-naive</td>
<td>47 (73.4)</td>
<td>9 (14.1)</td>
<td>4 (6.1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Quantitative viral shedding (mean \(\log_{10}\)) occurred among participants with a major reaction or vesicle formation after the initial vaccination. Swab samples were obtained from the vaccination site every 3 to 5 days or until eschar formation. The lower limit of detection was 1 \(\log_{10}\) pfu/mL (dotted line). Participants with healed lesions were not sampled beyond day 14. Therefore, the number of participants tested beyond day 14 represent those still having a lesion. The 4 values shown below the lower limit of detection were assigned values of 0.5.

**Virus Shedding and Antibody Responses**

Vaccinia virus was recovered from 246 (67%) of the 368 lesion swab samples collected from participants after initial vaccination between visit 3 (days 3-5) and visit 7 (days 26-30) or until the lesion scabbed. Sixty of 64 non-naive and all 10 vaccinia-naive participants had virus isolated on at least 1 occasion. Vaccinia-naive participants exhibited higher peak mean (SD) titers of virus (3.3 [0.8] \(\log_{10}\) pfu/mL) than the non-naive participants (\(P = .002; t\) test of combined peak mean titers of the naive and non-naive participants). Among the non-naive participants, the peak mean (SD) titers of individuals shedding virus on any day were 3.6 (1.5) pfu/mL for those given undiluted vaccine, 4.0 (1.3) pfu/mL for the participants given 1:3.2 diluted vaccine, 3.4 (1.4) pfu/mL for the participants given 1:10 diluted vaccine, and 4.0 (1.9) pfu/mL for those given 1:32 diluted vaccine. Specifically, the peak mean (SD) titers of virus were 3.0 (1.9) \(\log_{10}\) pfu/mL for the non-naive participants given undiluted vaccine on day 10; 3.1 (1.9) \(\log_{10}\) pfu/mL for those given a 1:3.2 dilution of vaccine on day 10; 2.7 (1.5) \(\log_{10}\) pfu/mL for those given a 1:10 dilution on day 14; and 4.4 (1.9) \(\log_{10}\) pfu/mL for those given a 1:32 on day 14 (FIGURE 2). The vaccinia-naive group shed a peak mean (SD) of 4.6 (1.4) \(\log_{10}\) pfu/mL on day 14.

A clinical response to vaccination with a major reaction resulted in 4-fold antibody or greater increase in antibody of 68 non-naive participants with a successful vaccination after dose 1 or dose 2. Sixty-seven (99%) of 68 non-naive participants had a 2-fold or greater increase in antibody. Among the 12 non-naive participants without successful vaccination after either dose, 3 had 4-fold or greater increase in neutralizing antibody responses. All vaccinia-naive participants had a 4-fold or greater increase in antibody responses. The kinetics of the serum antibody responses are shown in FIGURE 3A and Figure 3B. Of the 80 non-naive participants, 76 (95%) had preexisting antibody and all vaccinia-naive participants were seronegative before vaccination (\(P < .001; t\) test between the vaccinia-naive group and the non-naive groups combined). The geometric mean serum neutralizing antibody titer for prevaccination and postvaccination for days 12-15, 26-30, and 6 months postvaccination was not significantly different among the 4 groups of non-naive participants who manifested major reactions after the initial vaccination. Serum neutralizing antibody responses increased sharply and peaked by days 12-15 in the non-naive participants while the peak antibody response in the vaccinia-naive group did not occur until day 28. Postvaccination antibody titers in the vaccinia-naive participants were significantly lower (\(P = .002\) for day 28 and \(P = .003\) for 6 months) than in the non-naive participants. Binding antibody (enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay) responses (Figure 3B) were similar to the neutralizing antibody results.
**COMMENT**

The New York City Board of Health strain is the only vaccine approved for use in the United States to prevent smallpox. This study suggests that this vaccine can be diluted to a titer of $10^{2.0}$ pfu/mL (1:3.2 dilution) and still result in a major reaction and antibody production in 90% of previously vaccinated (non-naive) persons. We also found that the vaccine can be diluted to a titer of $10^{8.5}$ pfu/mL (1:10 dilution) and still result in a major reaction and antibody production in 81% to 86% of previously vaccinated (non-naive) participants. These results suggest that it is possible to use the same vaccine dilution in vaccinia-naive and non-naive individuals.

The viral shedding pattern of participants given the 1:32 dilution of vaccine more closely resembled the pattern of vaccinia-naive participants than other non-naive groups. Only 10 of 19 participants given the 1:32 dilution of vaccine developed a primary reaction and those individuals had a similar shedding pattern as the vaccinia-naive participants. This suggests that a subset of non-naive participants was more susceptible to a small vaccine inoculum and the resulting growth curve in this more susceptible subset was similar to that of vaccinia-naive participants.

Preexisting antibody was present in 76 of 80 non-naive participants and preexisting immunity appeared to modify the lesion size, reduced the quantity of virus shed, and reduced adverse events. Vaccination of non-naive participants was associated with smaller skin lesions at the vaccination site and significantly lower incidence of fever than among vaccinia-naive participants. Compared with historical data from our previous study in 665 vaccinia-naive participants, non-naive participants in this study had fewer headaches, chills, malaise, and other clinical events following smallpox vaccination, probably due to immunologic memory. These observations support the US Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices’ recommendation of preferential vaccination of non-naive health care workers when it is feasible.

The vaccination dose did not result in a significant difference in neutralizing antibody mean titer or binding antibody mean titer responses among previously vaccinated participants at any time point. Antibody titers peaked 2 weeks earlier and were significantly higher at all measured time points in non-naive participants compared with the vaccinia-naive participants. The preexisting neutralizing antibodies, early peak in antibody titers, and higher mean titers of antibody in non-naive participants supports the hypothesis that B cell memory is long-lived after smallpox vaccination.

**REFERENCES**


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