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February 12, 2003

Contact: Bill Parizek
850-245-4111

**PUBLIC HEALTH NURSES SERVING AS PART OF CORE TEAM FOR
OPERATION VACCINATE FLORIDA**

TALLAHASSEE—Florida Department of Health (DOH) Secretary John O. Agwunobi, M.D., M.B.A., applauds the public health nurses who are volunteering in Operation Vaccinate Florida (OVF), the state's voluntary smallpox vaccination program. This group composes a large number of the first volunteers receiving the smallpox vaccine in Florida, and has been instrumental in training teams throughout the state giving the vaccinations.

"These public health nurse heroes are part of the first line of defense against disease and illness," said Agwunobi. "Their roles reflect the core public health functions of assessment, policy development and assurance that care will be available for everyone who needs it."

Five Florida public health nurses participated in smallpox administration training in December at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, Georgia. These nurses then trained more than 1,200 nurses and medical staff in Florida. The five nurses who received training at the CDC represented the Bureau of Immunization, Office of Public Health Nursing, Bureau of Tuberculosis, Bureau of Emergency Medical Services and the Office of Performance Improvement. They held training sessions across the state for their colleagues. More than 1,200 nurses and medical staff attended the 21 training sessions led by DOH's Office of Performance Improvement from January 10 to January 31.

The goal was to train 500 personnel in three weeks, but every session had 20 to 40 more people than scheduled, according to Sandra Schoenfisch, R.N., Ph.D., training coordinator for DOH. Trainers worked in pairs, providing an overview of smallpox, screening and education of potential vaccinees, contraindications, administration, site care and follow-up. All participants were given a variety of educational and training materials for use in their area. The trainers also supervised a practicum for participants on administering smallpox vaccinations.

"From the beginning of Operation Vaccinate Florida, nurses have demonstrated that they stand ready to protect the citizens of Florida," said Deputy Secretary and Chief Public Health Nurse Annie Neasman, R.N., M.S. "Their enthusiasm, commitment and spirit to protect Floridians is inspiring to see. This is our mission – to work with our teams to ensure the health and safety of our families, our neighbors and our communities. Our nurses are energized."

Public health nursing is more than 100 years old in Florida. Nurses have always faced challenges here, helping to battle diseases like yellow fever and malaria and going door-to-door in the aftermath of Hurricane Andrew to assess the health status of victims and offer assistance. As with OVF, public health nurses have played a key role in developing policies and procedures as well as educating the public about health issues.

"This situation is no different from others for public health nurses," said Neasman. "This is an opportunity for our public health nurses to be at the forefront of implementing an important part of Florida's preparedness efforts. We're making sure we are ready in case we're mobilized for an emergency."

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