Adverse Reactions to HIV Vaccines: Medical, Ethical, and Legal Issues

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IDS researchers are investigating new vaccines that would prevent infection with HIV and reduce the spread of AIDS. Some have argued that product liability concerns have discouraged investment in HIV vaccine research and development. The purpose of this OTA background paper is to describe the current state of development of HIV vaccines, and to discuss what is known about adverse reactions that may occur. The background paper provides an overview of ethical issues that arise in the conduct of HIV vaccine trials. The report also discusses alternatives to the current product liability system to encourage the development of HIV vaccines and to fairly compensate those who are harmed as a result of adverse reactions to the vaccine.

This background paper was prepared in response to a request from the Subcommittee on Health of the House Ways and Means Committee. It is eleventh in OTA's series of studies on HIV-related issues. The preceding papers in this series were:

- Do Insects Transmit AIDS? (9/87),
- AIDS and Health Insurance: An OTA Survey (2/88),
- How Effective is AIDS Education? (6/88),
- The Impact of AIDS on the Kaiser Permanente Medical Care Program (Northern California Region) (7/88),
- How Has Federal Research on AIDS/HIV Disease Contributed to Other Fields? (4/90),
- The Effectiveness of Drug Abuse Treatment: Implications for Controlling AIDS/HIV Infection (9/90),
- HIV in the Health Care Workplace (11/91),
- The CDC’s Case Definition of AIDS: Implications of the Proposed Revisions (8/92),
- Difficult-to-reuse Needles for the Prevention of HIV Infection Among Injecting Drug Abusers (10/92), and
- External Review of the Federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s HIV Prevention Programs (9/94).

Other OTA reports addressing AIDS-related issues include:

- Blood Policy and Technology (1/85),
- Review of the Public Health Service’s Response to AIDS (technical memorandum, 1/85),
- The Cost of AIDS and Other HIV Infections: Review of the Estimates (staff paper, 5/87),
- Medical Testing and Health Insurance (8/88),
- Adolescent Health (11/91), and
- The Continuing Challenge of Tuberculosis (9/93).

ROGER C. HERDMAN
Director
Project Staff

Clyde J. Behney
Assistant Director, OTA

Sean Tunis
Health Program Director

ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF
Louise Staley
Office Administrator

Carolyn Martin
Word Processing Specialist

Monica Finch
Word Processing Specialist

Charlotte Brown
Word Processing Specialist

Carolyn Swann
PC Specialist

PRINCIPAL PROJECT STAFF
Robert S. McDonough
Study Director

Jay Randolph
Research Analyst\textsuperscript{1}

Thomas McDaniels, Jr.
Research Assistant\textsuperscript{2}

PRINCIPAL CONTRACTORS
David T. Karzon
Vanderbilt University Medical Center

Wendy Mariner
Boston University School of Public Health and School of Medicine

CONTRACTORS
Nancy Kass
Johns Hopkins University
School of Hygiene and Public Health

David Schwartz
Johns Hopkins University
School of Hygiene and Public Health

Robert Stein
Blicker & Stein

PUBLISHING STAFF
Mary Lou Higgs
Manager

Arna Lane
Production Editor

Bonnie Sparks
Electronic Publishing Specialist

Christine Onrubia
Senior Graphic Designer

\textsuperscript{1}Through September 1994
\textsuperscript{2}From September 1994
Workshop Participants

ISSUES IN THE DEVELOPMENT AND MARKETING OF AN AIDS VACCINE—April 6, 1994

Lawrence Miike, Chairman
Health Care Administration Division
Department of Human Services
State of Hawaii
Honolulu, HI

Don Des Jarlais
Research Director
Chemical Dependency Institute and Grants Management Research Support
Beth Israel Medical Center
New York, NY

Christine Grady
Research Associate
National Institute of Nursing Research
National Institutes of Health
Bethesda, MD

Derek Hodel
Director of Treatment and Research Issues
AIDS Action Council
Washington, DC

Rodney Hoff
Chief, Vaccine Trials
Vaccine Trials and Epidemiology Branch
Division of AIDS
National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases
National Institutes of Health
Bethesda, MD

Michael Horowitz
Senior Fellow
Manhattan Institute
Washington, DC

Peter Barton Hutt
Partner
Covington & Burling
Washington, DC

David T. Karzon
Professor of Pediatrics, Microbiology and Immunology Division of Pediatric Infectious Diseases
Vanderbilt University Medical Center
Nashville, TN

Nancy Kass
Assistant Professor
Program in Law, Ethics, and Health Department of Health Policy and Management
School of Hygiene and Public Health
Johns Hopkins University
Baltimore, MD

Wendy Mariner
Professor of Health Law
Health Law Department
Boston University School of Public Health and School of Medicine
Boston, MA

Tom Matthews
Associate Professor of Experimental Surgery
Department of Surgery
Duke University School of Medicine
Durham, NC

David Schwartz
Assistant Professor
Department of Immunology and Infectious Diseases
School of Hygiene and Public Health
Johns Hopkins University
Baltimore, MD

John Siegfried
Associate Vice President for Medical Affairs
Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers Association
Washington, DC

Robert Stein
Partner
Blicker & Stein
Washington, DC

Tom Vernon
Executive Director
Medical, Scientific, and Public Health Affairs
Merck Vaccine Division
Bluebell, PA

Roy Widdus
Consultant
National Vaccine Program Office
Washington, DC

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