Ethics on Demand – Vaccines for Healthcare Workers

**Article:** [**Lab Tech Accidentally Injects Herself with Smallpox-Related Virus**](https://www.livescience.com/vaccinia-virus-infection-fingertip.html)

**What was the situation?**

A lab worker in San Diego became infected with a smallpox-related virus (vaccinia) after she accidentally stuck her finger with a needle. The infection caused the tip of the woman's finger to swell and turn black, taking three months to heal. Although the lab worker was offered the smallpox vaccine before the incident, she declined the vaccination as she "did not appreciate the extent of infection that could occur" and she believed that the potential side effects of the vaccine would be challenging to manage.

**What went wrong?**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Lack of advocating one’s role as a leader in the promotion of health  | Lack of understanding in risk-prone situation | Ineffective health and safety communication to staff |

**Using the Code of Ethics**

The [CSMLS Code of Ethics](https://www.csmls.org/About-Us/Our-Members/Code-of-Ethics.aspx) serves to define and expand the inherent ethical concepts contained in the [CSMLS Code of Professional Conduct](https://www.csmls.org/About-Us/Our-Members/Code-of-Conduct.aspx), document expectations of ethical behaviour for all medical laboratory professionals and provide a framework during professional and personal self-evaluation. Consider how adhering to these codes could have prevented the situation. What other codes are applicable?

*Code of Ethics*

* 1.3 Recognize risk prone situations in order to minimize harm to patients, staff and self.
* 1.5 Assume responsibility for errors one has committed or observed and take immediate action to prevent or minimize associated harm.
* 1.6 Advocate for working environments that support safe, competent and ethical practices.

*Code of Professional Conduct*

* Medical laboratory professionals shall practise safe work procedures at all times to ensure the safety of patients and co-workers and the protection of the environment.
* Medical laboratory professionals shall endeavour to maintain and improve their skills and knowledge and keep current with scientific advances. They will uphold academic integrity in all matters of professional certification and continuing education.
* Medical laboratory professionals shall share their knowledge with colleagues and promote learning.

**Relevant Articles**

# [Mandatory vaccines to continue in Italy after measles outbreaks](https://www.thelocal.it/20181115/mandatory-vaccines-to-continue-in-italy-after-measles-outbreaks)

[Are Your Healthcare Workers Armed With the Right Vaccinations?](https://www.infectioncontroltoday.com/infection-preventionists/are-your-healthcare-workers-armed-right-vaccinations)

[Human error in high-biocontainment labs: a likely pandemic threat](https://thebulletin.org/2019/02/human-error-in-high-biocontainment-labs-a-likely-pandemic-threat/)