



# NOTE FOR THE PRESS

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Note for the press N°7  
25 October 2002

## WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION INSPECTS RUSSIAN SMALLPOX LABORATORY

**GENEVA** -- A team of international biosafety experts appointed by the World Health Organization (WHO) has recently completed an inspection of the smallpox research laboratory at the State Research Centre of Virology and Biotechnology (Vector) in Koltsovo, part of the Novosibirsk Region of the Russian Federation. The inspection team was pleased to note that all previous recommendations on procedures and safety had been addressed.

The team concluded that the facility can safely be used for work with the Variola virus (which causes smallpox) provided that current protocols are strictly applied. The team was also impressed by the dedication and the competence of the workforce at the facility.

The team was also pleased to see that the building dedicated to work with Variola virus was being renovated. A follow-up visit is planned when that work is completed and the laboratories have been validated and are once again fully operational.

Vector is one of two WHO Collaborating Centres which currently house stocks of the virus which causes smallpox. The other is at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, Georgia, the United States of America.

Under the terms of a series of resolutions passed by the World Health Assembly since the eradication of smallpox was officially confirmed in 1980, these facilities are regularly inspected by WHO-appointed biosafety teams. The most recent resolution, passed in May 2002, specifies that the purpose of the inspections is to confirm the strict containment of existing stocks and to ensure a safe research environment for work with the Variola virus.

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