

Health officials recommend tetanus shots for those who suffer wounds

With the amount of debris left by a tropical storm or hurricane, those involved in clean-up could be at risk of injury.

Here is information on who may or may not need to receive a tetanus shot.

- If you do not have a cut or wound, you do not need to get tetanus shot – regardless of your exposure to floodwater.
- If you get a cut or puncture wound and haven't had a tetanus shot, then you will need to get one.
- If you get a wound or deep cut that worries you, seek medical attention to determine if you need to get a tetanus shot or tetanus booster.
- Regardless of your exposure to flood water, proper wound care is essential for all cuts and lacerations.

What is tetanus?

Tetanus, sometimes called lockjaw, is a disease that affects the nervous system. You catch it through a cut or wound that becomes infected with tetanus bacteria. The bacteria can get in through even a tiny pinprick or scratch, but deep puncture wounds or cuts – such as those made by nails, knives or barbed-wire – are especially at risk of infection with tetanus. Tetanus bacteria are present everywhere and are found in soil, dust and manure. Tetanus infection causes severe muscle spasms, leading to "locking" of the jaw so the patient cannot open his/her mouth or swallow, and may even lead to death by suffocation. Tetanus is not contagious.

Symptoms

Symptoms usually begin eight days after infection, but may range in onset from three days to three weeks. Common first signs of tetanus are headache and stiffness in the jaw (lockjaw) followed by neck stiffness, difficulty in swallowing, stiffening of stomach muscles, spasms, sweating and fever.

If you're being deployed to work on recovery efforts, you should contact your primary care provider or local county health department prior to deployment if you think you might need a tetanus shot.

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