



COUNTY HEALTH MATTERS

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Tetanus

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Time for a Tetanus Booster?

Springtime finds people of all ages heading outside to garden, picnic, and have fun in the sun. Outdoor recreation can create problems, however, and one of them is potential tetanus exposure. Most tetanus related injuries occur in yards, gardens, farms, and other outdoor locations.

Tetanus, commonly called lockjaw, is a bacterial disease that affects the nervous system. It is contracted through a cut or wound that becomes contaminated with tetanus bacteria. The bacteria can get in through a tiny pinprick or scratch, but deep puncture wounds or cuts like those made by nails or knives are especially susceptible to infection.

Most people associate Tetanus with rusty nails, but the truth is that the tetanus germs are found everywhere. The bacteria are very common in soil, dust, and manure. Once inside a wound, they can produce a poison, which spreads throughout the body.

The first signs of tetanus infection are usually a headache and spasms of the jaw muscles. The victim may become irritable. As the poison spreads, it causes muscle spasms in the neck, arms, legs, and stomach. The victim may get painful convulsions, which can be severe enough to cause broken bones. Some of the people infected may have to spend several weeks in intensive care.

In the United States, three of every 10 persons who get tetanus die from the tetanus infection. For those who survive, recovery can be long and difficult. Other complications of tetanus can include breathing problems, bone fractures, high blood pressure, abnormal heartbeats, clotting in the blood vessels of the lung, pneumonia, and coma.

Vaccination is the best way to protect against tetanus. An effective vaccine against this disease has been available for many years. It is usually given to children, combined with diphtheria and pertussis vaccines, as part of their primary series in a shot called DTaP. Children over the age of 7, adolescents and adults are given Td vaccine, which is a tetanus and diphtheria combination. A Td booster is recommended every 10 years throughout a person's lifetime, or as little as 5 years if the person suffers a wound that is deep or dirty. The Td booster should be given as soon as possible after the injury occurs.

Tetanus is a very serious and painful disease that can be prevented. The Warren County Health Department offers tetanus boosters to persons of all ages. If you are not sure when your last shot was, then you probably need one. Call our office Monday through Friday from 8:00 am to 4:30 pm to schedule an appointment.