

# Do I Need A Tetanus Shot?

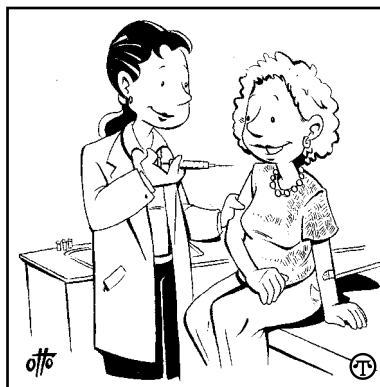
(NAPSA)—As spring weather rolls in, shoes and socks start coming off. Floods often occur across the country from heavy spring showers and melting snow. The good weather also kicks off the season to travel abroad. What do all these things have in common, besides occurring in the spring? They pose a threat for tetanus infection.

You may already be aware that stepping on a rusty nail or a puncture wound could cause a tetanus infection, a bacterial disease that affects the nervous system and is often fatal. What you may not know is that tetanus bacteria can also enter the body even through a tiny pinprick, a scratch from an animal, splinters, bug bites and even burns that break the skin.

"Your best defense against tetanus is vaccination," said Kathleen Clem, MD, of the American College of Emergency Physicians. "Although vaccination has made this disease uncommon in the United States, too many people, especially infants and the elderly, still die from tetanus."

Tetanus vaccination is one of the recommended childhood immunizations and should begin during infancy. In most parts of the United States, tetanus immunization is required before starting school. The first time you are vaccinated, you will receive a series of five shots spread out over several months. Generally, children start vaccination at 2 months of age and the shots are usually completed by age five. After those first series of shots, you should receive a booster shot every 10 years.

If you step on a nail or suffer a wound that is deep and dirty, and haven't had a tetanus shot in the past 10 years, you need help fast. Seek medical attention immedi-



ately and rinse the wound with tap water. Do not cleanse with soap or apply antiseptic to a deep wound.

Besides a tetanus shot, your doctor may also give you an injection of something called tetanus immune globulin, which acts fast to prevent infection. There is a small window of opportunity for the tetanus immune globulin to work, so don't delay seeking medical care.

Be aware of the first signs of tetanus infection. Also known as lockjaw, tetanus causes stiffness of the neck, difficulty swallowing, rigidity of abdominal muscles, spasms, sweating and fever. Symptoms usually begin eight days after the infection, but occur anywhere within three days to three weeks.

"It is important to keep an immunization record for everyone in the family," said Dr. Clem. "One of the main reasons people die from this disease is because they didn't realize their vaccination had expired."

To obtain a free Immunization Record form, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to Immunization Record Form, ACEP, 2121 K Street, NW, Suite 325, Washington, D.C. 20037.