



Health Hints



Home Repair Expert Bob Vila Wants To Educate Do-It-Yourselfers To Think About Their Health When Planning Renovation Projects

(NAPSA)—As the popularity of do-it-yourself home renovation projects continues to increase, it is important to remember certain safety precautions for the whole family. While many people protect themselves by wearing goggles or gloves, some family members may have let down their guard against tetanus—a potentially fatal infectious disease.

Tetanus bacteria are everywhere and even the smallest injuries—a scrape for example—may increase the risk of infection. Surprisingly, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that nearly half of injuries resulting in tetanus infection between 1998 and 2000 occurred indoors or at home.

According to Bob Vila, America's best-known authority on home improvement, "It's easy to injure yourself when working on home renovation projects and it's the minor cuts and scrapes—not only injuries that require medical attention—that can put you at risk for tetanus." Mr. Vila has teamed up with the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases' (NFID) and the National Coalition for Adult Immunization's (NCAI) Power of 10 campaign to encourage families to protect themselves against tetanus before tackling home projects and to receive a tetanus booster every 10 years.

Bob Vila reminds families to safeguard their health by including tetanus vaccination as part of the renovation planning process, since many projects involve exposure to materials or tools where tetanus bacteria commonly gather.

What Is Tetanus?

"Tetanus is an extremely painful condition that can require a lengthy hospital stay and months of rehabilitation," ex-

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plains infectious disease specialist and NFID Medical Director Susan J. Rehm, MD. "Although tetanus is rare in the U.S., it is a fatal disease for one out of every 10 people infected. Since tetanus is preventable through vaccination, even one case is too many."

A recent case demonstrates how a simple injury can lead to a serious problem and the severity of tetanus infection. In 2002, a man in Puerto Rico got a splinter in his right hand. He sought medical care three times in 11 days, twice via the emergency room—with symptoms ranging from weakness to difficulty walking, talking and swallowing. On the third medical visit, he was diagnosed with tetanus, admitted to the intensive care unit and put on a ventilator to assist breathing. He ultimately survived, after nearly eight weeks recovering in the hospital.

The Importance of Immunity

Health officials recommend a tetanus vaccine every 10 years, starting at age 11 or 12. According to CDC, more than half of American adults over 20 years of age are not protected against both tetanus and diphtheria, another potentially fatal infectious disease

passed from person-to-person (the vaccines for tetanus and diphtheria—called the "Td" booster—are combined since both are needed every 10 years).

"With more families taking part in home projects than ever before, it is especially important to stay protected against tetanus," adds Dr. Rehm. "These activities put families at risk for tetanus infection, especially in those cases where the family is not up-to-date on their Td booster."

What is Diphtheria?

Diphtheria is a highly-contagious disease that is contracted by inhaling bacteria from an infected person. Diphtheria is still common in 87 countries, with some strains continuing to circulate in parts of the U.S. Travel destinations where diphtheria is found include certain parts of Africa, Europe, Central America, the Caribbean, the former Soviet republics and Asia. Symptoms begin very much like a common cold, usually two to five days after transmission, but can progress quickly. The infection can lead to heart failure and paralysis and coma or even death can occur in as little as a week.

Tetanus and diphtheria vaccinations are given to virtually all children in this country. Because protective levels of tetanus and diphtheria antibodies both decline over time, the tetanus and diphtheria boosters are needed every 10 years, starting in adolescence and continuing throughout life.

NFID advises everyone to take advantage of 10-year Td vaccine protection, especially those engaging in home renovation projects. More information about tetanus or diphtheria is available at www.nfid.org.