

# Children's HEALTH

## Make Immunizations A Family Affair

(NAPSA)—As families reflect on the school year, parents typically ensure that their children receive their required immunizations. To help, the National Association of School Nurses (NASN) is reminding parents and teens that they too need to be up-to-date on their immunizations for various infectious diseases such as tetanus and diphtheria (Td).

While an estimated 94 percent of children under six years of age are currently protected against tetanus and diphtheria, the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) estimates that 53 percent of Americans over the age of 20 are no longer protected against these two diseases. "Whole-family wellness visits" represent one method of improving adult and adolescent immunization rates.

"Because immunity against these two diseases does not last forever, it is important to ask your doctor about a Td booster shot and have the peace of mind that your entire family stays protected," says NASN President Janis Hootman, PhD, RN, BSN, MST. "It is important to know your immunization status and receive a Td booster once every 10 years after childhood."

NASN is raising awareness of tetanus and diphtheria prevention

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as nurses frequently receive calls about what vaccines are needed before a child can enter school. The school nurse can also take advantage of this opportunity to not only answer these questions, but also inquire about the vaccination status of the parent and/or guardian.

"Tetanus is a common bacteria found in the environment and can be caused by more than just stepping on a rusty nail. Something as simple as a splinter from playground equipment or a scraped knee during recess could also be potential sources of tetanus infection," notes NASN President Janis Hootman.

Almost all reported cases of tetanus (children especially) occur in persons who have either never

been vaccinated, or those who completed a primary series but have not had a booster vaccination in the past 10 years. Fortunately, a combined shot can protect against tetanus and diphtheria with a single booster dose for the next 10 years.

### **Tetanus & Diphtheria**

Unlike many other vaccine-preventable diseases, tetanus is not transmitted from person-to-person. Tetanus is caused by a common bacterium that is widespread in our environment, and any wound presents the opportunity for an infection. Despite the availability of safe and highly effective vaccines, 130 cases of tetanus were reported to the CDC from 1998-2000, 18 percent of which resulted in death.

Diphtheria is contracted by inhaling the bacteria from an infected person. The infection can lead to heart failure, paralysis and coma; even death can occur in as little as a week. The disease is still common in 87 countries, many of them common travel destinations.

For more information about tetanus or diphtheria, visit [www.nasn.org](http://www.nasn.org), or visit the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases' (NFID) Web site, [www.nfid.org](http://www.nfid.org).