

HEALTH ALERT!

Risk Of Tetanus And Diphtheria Increases With Outdoor Activities And Travel

(NAPSA)—More Americans are lacing up, digging in, and teeing off with outdoor recreational activity than ever before. Whether it's softball, gardening or home improvement, each of these activities present a risk for tetanus infection, according to the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases (NFID).

Most people know that stepping on a rusty nail means a trip to the doctor or emergency room for a tetanus shot, but other, simpler injuries can also put people at risk for getting this serious and possibly deadly disease. Fortunately, a single booster shot once every 10 years can protect against tetanus, and another highly contagious disease found in many common travel spots, diphtheria.

"Warm weather and softball are core to the natural athlete in me, and I was surprised to learn that tetanus can be caused by something as simple as a splinter from a bench or a scrape sliding into home plate," says two-time Olympic gold medalist in softball (1996, 2000) Dot Richardson, M.D. Dr. Richardson has joined NFID in alerting the public to check their Td booster status with their physicians and to get up-to-date.

Causes of Tetanus

"Tetanus is caused by a common bacteria in our environment that enters the body through any wound, be it serious or minor," says NFID President Susan Rehm, M.D. "If someone gets a small wound but has forgotten to get a booster shot in the previous 10 years, they could be at risk for an infection."

During a three-year period ending in 1997, 120 cases of tetanus were reported in the U.S.,

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with 93 linked to a specific wound injury. Although half were due to puncture wounds, including things like stepping on nails (rusty or clean), other common injuries were also to blame. Cuts, scrapes, splinters, animal bites, surgery, self-performed tattooing and body piercing also caused tetanus infections. Both minor and major injuries may put you at risk for tetanus, which is why it is important to be up-to-date on your routine tetanus booster shot.

Activities That Increase Tetanus Risk

For adolescents and adults, some of the most common outdoor activities that pose a potential risk for tetanus infection are bicycling, walking, basketball, roller sports, soccer, backpacking and baseball/softball. Other activities strongly associated with tetanus risk include gardening/landscaping and yard work around the house.

"Each of these activities is an at-risk situation for tetanus infection, especially to those who are not up to date on their Td booster," adds Dr. Susan Rehm. "With more of us participating in outdoor sports than ever before, it is especially important to stay on guard against tetanus."

According to the CDC, more than half of American adults over

20 years of age are not adequately immunized against both tetanus and diphtheria.

Even a leisurely afternoon in the garden can create the perfect environment for tetanus exposure—imagine nicking yourself with a spade while planting seeds or even puncturing your skin with a rose thorn. The CDC found that 39 percent of the tetanus cases in 2001 were related to farming or gardening.

Diphtheria

Diphtheria is a disease caused by bacteria passed from one person to another that infects the throat and nasal passages. Like tetanus, it can be fatal if left untreated. Diphtheria is still common in 87 countries, many of them popular travel destinations in the Caribbean, South America, Africa, and even some parts of Europe. Maintaining an up-to-date Td booster is the best way to ensure protection against diphtheria during foreign travel and to keep the disease from recurring in the U.S.

An Ounce of "Protection"...

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 combined into a single "Td" vaccine to be given every 10 years, starting in adolescence and continuing throughout life.

The NFID advises everyone to take advantage of 10 year Td vaccine protection, especially those engaging in outdoor activities or planning international travel. More information about tetanus or diphtheria is available at www.nfid.org.