



Allegheny County Health Department

Tetanus: A Fact Sheet

What is Tetanus?

Severe, non-contagious disease of the nervous system caused by bacteria that enters a burn, infected cut, scrape or wound. It is also called “lockjaw”.

What can happen with Tetanus?

Painful muscle spasms that lead to “locking” of the jaw making it difficult to open the mouth or to swallow. Early symptoms include lockjaw, stiffness in the neck and abdomen and difficulty swallowing. Later symptoms include fever, elevated blood pressure and severe muscle spasms. Death occurs in about 11 percent of cases, especially in people over age 60 years.

How do you get Tetanus in a flood?

Tetanus bacteria from sewage may be carried in floodwaters. Germs enter through a deep puncture wound that could result from stepping on submerged items like a rusty nail, jagged glass or splintered wood.

What should I do if I’m injured?

Seek medical attention. Do-it-yourself first aid may not be adequate treatment. Pre-exposure immunization is the only sure way to be protected from Tetanus.

How often do I need a Tetanus shot?

Vaccinated person’s immunity lasts 10 years. If vaccinated within the last decade, there is no need to get another inoculation. Allegheny County Health Department offers Tetanus shots at 3441 Forbes Ave., Oakland from 9 a.m. – 4 p.m., Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday and from 1 p.m. to 8 p.m., Wednesday.

What else can I do to protect myself?

When working in floodwaters and flood-soaked environments, limit exposure to Tetanus and other bacteria by wearing heavy-duty rubber gloves and boots. Pay close attention to hygiene, especially good hand washing practices. Protect open cuts, burns or wounds with waterproof bandages when working in flooded areas. Cover those bandages with a second barrier, such as rubber gloves, boots or a wet suit. Avoid flooded areas if you have a weakened immune system.

Need more information?

Call the Allegheny County Health Department at 412-687-ACHD

<http://www.achd.net/factsheet/tet.htm>