

## Prevention of Tetanus in Persons Exposed to Flood Waters

The West Virginia Bureau for Public Health provides the following recommendations for use of tetanus-containing vaccines. The following recommendations hold true at any time, but are especially important during a flood and the ensuing clean up:

### What is tetanus and tetanus vaccine?

- Tetanus is a disease contracted by getting the tetanus bacteria into an open cut or wound. Although tetanus is rare, it can be very serious or even fatal.
- Tetanus is preventable by making sure a person is up to date on their tetanus immunization. This is usually done by getting a tetanus booster every 10 years.
- Tetanus booster vaccine is now usually combined with diphtheria and pertussis vaccines as “Tdap” to provide protection against all three diseases.
- Unless previously vaccinated with the same, Tdap is the recommended vaccine for persons age 10-64 years of age. Td (tetanus and diphtheria) is recommended for children between 7-9 years of age, persons 65 and older, and for repeat boosters.

### To whom should I give Tdap/Td vaccine?

Making sure that people at risk get the right vaccine at the right time is always important. Vaccinating too often or using vaccine inappropriately can cause problems.

Assess each person based on official recommendations. These are the same whether or not there has been a flood. The following individuals **should** receive tetanus vaccine:

- Persons lacking a complete series of tetanus-containing vaccine.
- Anyone who has not had a booster of Tdap/Td in the last 10 years, especially if they have a wound. (A booster in the last 10 years is fine for clean and minor wounds.)
- Anyone who has a more severe or dirty wound should receive Tdap/Td if more than 5 years have passed since their last Tdap/Td booster.
- It is vitally important to **thoroughly** screen persons when evaluating their need for tetanus-containing vaccine. Persons who receive the vaccine in shorter intervals are at increased risk for severe local reactions.
- In emergency situations, it may be necessary to prioritize use of vaccine for wound management purposes over routine booster dose use.

**Remember: Exposure to flood water alone is not a reason to give Tdap or Td.**

### What is the protocol for requesting and receiving tetanus vaccine?

Health Departments should contact their local Emergency Operations Center (EOC) for assistance with obtaining tetanus vaccines. This allows tracking of expenses and reimbursement for the same. It is fine to give a heads up on the request coming through official channels by calling the Health Desk at the State EOC (304-558-5380) or the WV immunization program (1-800-642-3634).