

Cook County Department of Public Health
Immunization Clinic Information for Flood Workers and First Responders

What you need to know about **Tetanus**

Tetanus, also called Lockjaw, is a disease of the nervous system caused by a germ called *clostridium tetani*, which enters the body through wounds such as lacerations, burns and punctures – however small – that become contaminated by dirt, sand, rust, water, feces or saliva containing tetanus. Tetanus spores are everywhere in the environment and can contaminate wounds of all types. *If you receive a cut or burn while working at the flood site, see your doctor immediately* because you may need additional treatment to protect against illness.

Who is at risk for Tetanus?

Adult homeowners, volunteers, and city personnel who might be working in or around floodwaters, and who have not had a Tetanus shot in 10 or more years, are most at risk for Tetanus. Most children have been immunized against Tetanus already. However, if you are concerned your children need immunizations, please call or visit our North District Office in Rolling Meadows. (See other sheet for clinic information).

What are the signs and symptoms of Tetanus?

Tetanus is characterized by stiff muscles and painful spasms that usually start within 3 to 21 days of exposure, in the jaw and neck and travel to the body's trunk muscles. A common first sign of tetanus in older children and adults is tightness in the abdomen. It can lead to 'locking' of the jaw, preventing victims from opening their mouths or swallowing. If untreated, tetanus can result in death. The fatality rate ranges from 10- to 90-percent and is highest in infants and the elderly.

How is Tetanus prevented?

Tetanus is not transmitted person-to-person. Your best defense against Tetanus is immunization. Check to be sure that all family members' immunizations are up-to-date. If records are not handy, call your physician or pediatrician to confirm immunization against Tetanus.

If a puncture wound, burn, cut, or scrape occurs while working in flooded area, medical attention should be sought from either an emergency room or primary care provider depending on the severity within 48 hours. The medical provider will determine if tetanus vaccine and/or tetanus immune globulin should be administered based on the condition of the wound and the client's vaccination history.

What risks are associated with the Tetanus vaccine?

The benefits of the Tetanus vaccine usually outweigh the risks. Most people have no problems. However, as with any medicine, serious problems such as allergic reaction could occur. Common mild symptoms can occur within hours and up to 1-2 days after vaccination, and may include: fever; redness, swelling or soreness near the injection site; fussiness, tiredness, and possibly, vomiting. Please see U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) handout for more information.