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Exposure to Flood Waters Alone Is Not a Reason to Receive a Tetanus Shot

Many residents throughout West Virginia continue the task of cleaning up their homes following the recent flooding and questions are being asked about when is the appropriate time for a tetanus shot. Immunization Services Director Jeff Neccuzi today said, "Exposure to flood water alone is not a reason to get a tetanus shot. Getting tetanus vaccinations in shorter-than-recommended intervals increases the risk of a severe local reaction." The West Virginia Bureau for Public Health today released guidelines entitled *Prevention of Tetanus in Persons Exposed to Flood Waters*. The document offers the following recommendations for who should receive a tetanus shot:

- Individuals lacking a complete series of tetanus-containing vaccine
- Anyone who has not had a booster dose of Tdap/Td in the last 10 years, especially if they have a wound.
- Anyone who has a more severe or dirty wound should receive Tdap/Td if more than 5 years have elapsed since their last Tdap/Td booster.
- In emergency situations, it may be necessary to prioritize use of vaccine for wound management purposes over routine booster dose use.

Individuals who receive the vaccine in shorter intervals than recommended are at increased risk for severe local reaction.

Tetanus is a vaccine-preventable disease that is contracted by getting the tetanus bacteria into an open cut or wound. Tetanus booster vaccine is usually combined with diphtheria and pertussis vaccines as "Tdap" to provide protection against all three diseases. Unless previously vaccinated with the same, Tdap is recommended 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, as well as for repeat boosters.