



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Time for Your Tetanus

Tetanus Surveillance — United States, 2001–2008

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[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC — safer, healthier people.

[Dr. Gaynes] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the *MMWR*, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

Growing older doesn't mean outgrowing the need for keeping up your vaccinations. One that requires updating throughout life is tetanus.

Dr. Tejpratap Tiwari is a researcher with CDC's National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases. Tej is joining us today to discuss the importance of staying current on your tetanus vaccine. Welcome to the show, Tej.

[Dr. Tiwari] Thank you, Bob.

[Dr. Gaynes] Tej, how many cases of tetanus occur in the U.S. each year?

[Dr. Tiwari] Bob, over the last 10 years, about 30 cases per year occur.

[Dr. Gaynes] How do people get infected with tetanus?

[Dr. Tiwari] People can get infected when they're exposed to tetanus germs which live in our environment, particularly in the soil which is mixed with manure. When these germs enter the body, and they can enter the body through wounds, then they produce a poison or a toxin which binds with our nerves and this results in spasm of our muscles.

[Dr. Gaynes] So what exactly are the symptoms of tetanus infection?

[Dr. Tiwari] So the major symptom of tetanus is spasm of the muscles. These spasms can occur anywhere, particularly around the site of the wound, or they can be generalized. When they occur in the face, they can cause grimacing. When they occur around the jaw, they can lead to a condition known as lockjaw, in which the person cannot open his or her mouth. When it occurs in the muscles of the back, the back may become arched and, in fact, the spasms may be so intense that they can result in fracture of long bones.

[Dr. Gaynes] How can we protect ourselves against tetanus?

[Dr. Tiwari] We can protect ourselves against tetanus by getting ourselves vaccinated. Children should be vaccinated against tetanus as early as their second month of life. They should receive at least three doses of the vaccine in their first year of life, and then they should receive boosters

at about a year-and-a-half and subsequently, before school – by age four to six years of life. As they get older, another booster dose is recommended at age 11 to 12 years.

[Dr. Gaynes] Do adults need a booster of the tetanus vaccine?

[Dr. Tiwari] Bob, yes. After completing a childhood immunization series, it is recommended, actually, that an adult receive a dose of vaccine every 10 years for the rest of his life.

[Dr. Gaynes] Now, if someone gets a puncture wound and isn't sure if they're up-to-date on the tetanus shot, should they get the booster dose?

[Dr. Tiwari] Bob, yes. That person should receive a booster dose of the vaccine, and not only if they have a puncture wound, but, in fact, if they have any wound, they should receive a booster dose of the vaccine. The benefits of receiving a dose of the vaccine would far outweigh the risk of any side effects, such as a swollen arm that may result from receiving a vaccine dose too early from the last dose.

[Dr. Gaynes] Tej, where can listeners get more information about tetanus vaccine?

[Dr. Tiwari] Listeners can actually go to the CDC web page – www.cdc.gov – and they can type in the word “tetanus” in the search box.

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks, Tej. I've been talking today with CDC's Dr. Tejpratap Tiwari about staying current on your tetanus vaccine.

Remember, a booster dose of tetanus vaccine is recommended for all adults every 10 years. Check with your health care provider to make sure your vaccines are up-to-date.

Until next time, be well. This is Dr. Robert Gaynes for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.