

Your Bags Are Packed - But Are You Really Ready To Go?

- Before Your Next Trip, NFID Urges Travelers to Check on Their Tetanus Protection -

BETHESDA, Md., July 15 - Who would think a minor wound could ruin a family vacation or an important business trip? Something as simple as a blister from a new pair of shoes, a scrape on your arm when packing the car, or a cut caused when changing a tire -- any type of open wound -- is a risk for tetanus, a severe infection that can sometimes be fatal. But the risk is easily avoided with a routine tetanus booster.

Travel expert and Travel Channel host Tracy Gallagher is teaming up with the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases (NFID) on the Power of 10(TM) campaign to urge travelers to make sure they are up to date on their tetanus booster before they pack their bags.

Tetanus bacteria are common in the environment and can be found in dust and dirt. The bacteria can enter the body through even the tiniest wound, which can lead to an infection and an incapacitating disease.

"Anyone who travels can get cuts and scrapes from time-to-time, the kind that wouldn't send someone to see a doctor. But you shouldn't drop your guard when it comes to these seemingly simple wounds -- the consequences can be serious," says Gallagher. "As someone who travels more than 80,000 miles each year, I appreciate all you have to do to get ready to go. And this is a good item to put on the planning list before you take your next trip."

According to a telephone survey of 1,300 adult Americans conducted by the American Automobile Association (AAA), more than 209 million people planned road trips in 2004 for leisure, business or both. And, according to travel experts, Americans are predicted to travel in record numbers this summer, with a 2.3 percent increase from last year.

"When someone gets a tetanus infection, it usually leads to a long hospital stay, a machine to assist with breathing, and weeks or months of rehabilitation. Thankfully, it's not as common in the U.S. as it was before we had a preventive vaccine. But tetanus is still fatal for one out of every 10 people infected," explains NFID Medical Director Susan J. Rehm, MD. "That's why we want to reinforce the importance for everyone in the family to make sure they are up to date with the tetanus booster."

Almost all reported cases of tetanus occur in people who have either never been vaccinated or are not up to date on their booster. Tetanus protection starts with a series of three vaccinations, usually during infancy, followed by a booster starting at age 11 or 12 and continuing throughout adulthood.(1) The tetanus booster has been combined with a vaccine for diphtheria, another potentially fatal disease, traditionally given every 10 years.(2) While the vast majority of children between the ages of 6 and 11 years are vaccinated against both tetanus and diphtheria, protection fades with time. By age 20, only 47% are protected against these diseases.(1,2) Booster vaccination is required throughout life to guard against infection and its consequences.

What People Need to Know About Tetanus

Any type of open wound, including small cuts or scrapes, can provide an entryway for the tetanus bacteria to lead to infection. Tetanus is extremely painful and often requires critical care and lengthy hospitalization, followed by extensive rehabilitation. The most common form of tetanus causes paralysis and severe muscle spasms. While not contagious, tetanus is a rare disease that can be very difficult to diagnose.

Symptoms of tetanus can appear anywhere from three days to three weeks after exposure to the bacteria and may be accompanied by fever, sweating, elevated blood pressure, and rapid heartbeat.

What People Need to Know About Diphtheria

Diphtheria is a highly contagious disease that is contracted by inhaling bacteria from an infected person. Diphtheria is still common in 87 countries, with some strains continuing to circulate in parts of the U.S. Travel destinations where diphtheria is found include certain parts of Africa, Europe, Central America, the Caribbean, the former Soviet republics, and Asia. Symptoms begin very much like a common cold, usually two to five days after transmission, but can progress quickly. In some cases, a membrane grows and covers the throat, which can block the airway. The infection can lead to heart failure and paralysis. If enough toxins from the membrane are absorbed into the bloodstream, coma or even death can occur in as little as a week's time. It can be prevented by maintaining protection with an up to date vaccination.

NFID and the Power of 10 Campaign

Founded in 1973, the NFID is a non-profit organization dedicated to public and professional education about infectious diseases. To promote public education about tetanus and diphtheria risks and prevention, NFID created the Power of 10 campaign. Now in its third year, the campaign focuses on the importance of the entire family staying up to date with tetanus-diphtheria immunization to maintain

protective levels of immunity. For more information about the Power of 10 campaign, tetanus and diphtheria, and preventive vaccination, visit the NFID web site at <http://www.nfid.org/>.

The Power of 10 campaign is made possible by an unrestricted educational grant to NFID from Sanofi Pasteur.