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Health Department of Northwest Michigan

**Deep cuts and puncture wounds pose increased risk of tetanus
*Medical Director urges heightened awareness and resident safety***

The Health Department of Northwest Michigan is reminding area residents to take protective measures and necessary steps to prevent injury in the aftermath and clean-up efforts following the Gaylord tornado.

Tetanus is a very rare but serious illness caused by a bacterium called *Clostridium tetani*. Tetanus bacteria can be found everywhere in the environment, including soil, dust, and manure. The spores develop into bacteria when they enter the body through broken skin, usually as a result of injuries from contaminated objects. Symptoms of tetanus may include:

- Jaw cramping
- Sudden, involuntary muscle tightening (muscle spasms) — often in the stomach
- Painful muscle stiffness all over the body
- Trouble swallowing
- Jerking or staring (seizures)
- Headache
- Fever and sweating
- Changes in blood pressure and heart rate

Individuals should wash their hands frequently and keep minor cuts and scrapes clean. If you have concerns about an injury, or think a wound is getting infected contact your health care provider.

“Tetanus is a serious disease that occurs when bacteria enter the body. Prompt first aid of small wounds and any scrapes or break in your skin can help with healing and prevent unnecessary infection,” said Dr. Meyerson, Medical Director. “Anyone that sustained deep cuts or puncture wounds should seek medical attention for evaluation of tetanus. It is easily prevented through routine vaccination of children and adults and good wound care,” he added.

In addition to immediate and proper wound care, being up to date with tetanus vaccination is among the best tools in preventing tetanus infection. After sustaining a cut or puncture wound a tetanus shot is recommended when 5 or more years have passed since an individual's last booster, or if they have not completed the tetanus series. For clean (uncontaminated), minor wounds, a tetanus shot is only needed if it has been more than 10 years since the last booster.

Tetanus shots continued to be available at the health department, in addition to local pharmacies and at doctor's offices. To schedule vaccination at the health department, call 800-432-4121.

The Health Department of Northwest Michigan is mandated by the Michigan Public Health Code to promote wellness, prevent disease, provide quality healthcare, address health problems of vulnerable populations, and protect the environment for the residents and visitors of Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet, and Otsego counties. For more information, visit nwhealth.org.

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