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Facts about Immunizations and Risk for Infection during Floods

People commonly ask about the risk of tetanus and hepatitis during floods. Increases in tetanus and hepatitis infection have not been associated with flooding in the United States. However, direct contact with flooded areas may increase risk of injury. Thus, flooding serves as a good reminder to check your immunization records. Immunizations like tetanus and hepatitis are routinely recommended for adults and children.

Tetanus

People are at risk for tetanus infection when they are injured and open wounds or punctures are contaminated. Flooding has not been shown to increase the risk for tetanus disease, however cleaning up after a flood may increase your risk of injury. Any time you are wounded, ask your healthcare provider if you need a tetanus-containing vaccine to protect you from disease.

Routine schedule:

- Adults should receive a booster dose of tetanus- and diphtheria-containing vaccine every 10 years. Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis) vaccine is routinely recommended as it also protects against whooping cough which causes illness every year. (If you are injured, you may need another booster dose if it has been more than 5 years since your last dose.)
- Children need a basic series of four doses of tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis-containing vaccine between 2 and 18 months of age as well as booster doses at 4 to 6 years and 11 to 12 years of age.

Hepatitis A / Hepatitis B

Hepatitis immunizations are recommended for some people, based on behavioral, occupational, medical and, other risk factors. But, hepatitis risk is typically *not* increased solely due to exposure to flood waters. Hepatitis immunization is not a routine requirement for people volunteering or working in flooded areas.

Risk of Other Infections

Flood water may contain more bacteria, viruses, or other contaminants than usual due to its contact with land areas. Good hand-washing after contact with flood water will reduce your chance of contracting an infection. Children and pets should not be allowed to play in flooded areas because they may injure themselves, or ingest flood water or items contaminated by flood water. Flooding in the United States has not been associated with increases in diseases such as hepatitis, cholera, or typhoid fever.

Reliable sources of flood-related health information on the internet include:

Douglas County Health Department: <http://www.douglascountyhealth.com/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/floods/>