

Your Springtime Checklist May Not Be Complete Without Protection Against Tetanus

*~ HGTV personality Carson Arthur reminds Canadians that when working outside
an open wound is an open door to tetanus ~*

May 11, 2010 (OTTAWA, ON) – Rake the lawn...check.

Clean out the eavestroughs...check.

Sharpen the gardening tools...check.

Tetanus shot?

Whether the last of the snow is just melting, or the gardens are already in full bloom, Canadians from coast to coast are eagerly getting outside to cross jobs off their springtime checklist. But there is one item many Canadians may want to add to the top of their list this year – checking their immunization records to ensure their tetanus booster is up to date.

This spring, Carson Arthur, outdoor living expert and host of HGTV's *Green Force* and Global TV's *Room to Grow*, is joining the Canadian Coalition for Immunization Awareness & Promotion (CCIAP) to encourage Canadians to make sure they are protected against tetanus. The bacteria that cause tetanus live in soil, dirt and dust, and can enter the body through a cut or puncture in the skin – even a splinter is enough to let the bacteria in and cause infection.

“When preparing for an outdoor project, I find that most people, myself included, remember to take precautions like wearing safety glasses and steel-toed boots, but we don't often think to protect ourselves against hidden dangers like tetanus,” says Arthur. “Simple solutions like wearing gloves when digging in soil or composting, are an easy start.”

“Before I learned about the danger of contracting tetanus outdoors, I put myself at risk so many times and didn't even know it – from stepping on a rake, to cutting my hand on pruning shears, to scraping my knuckles while repairing the eavestrough,” adds Arthur. “That's why it's so important to be proactive and protect yourself. Getting cuts and scrapes are a fact of life when you work outdoors so why wait until you get hurt?”

Adults who have not had a tetanus booster in the last 10 years could be putting themselves at risk of contracting this rare but serious disease while working on their home or garden.

“Many people have no idea when they got their last tetanus shot. If you're not sure, now is a great time to get a booster and start keeping an immunization record so that you can keep track,” said Dr. Bonnie Henry, Chair of the CCIAP. “One helpful tip to help you remember is that if you get a tetanus booster this year, you'll need a new one at the change of each decade to ensure your protection stays up to date.”

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THE DIRT ON TETANUS

Tetanus is an illness caused by a toxin (or poison) made by bacteria that block normal control of nerve reflexes in the spinal column. Although many people associate tetanus with a cut from a rusty nail, you can get tetanus from many things including anything contaminated with even small amounts of animal feces, soil and dust. A significant portion of tetanus cases are caused by minor injuries people may not think would cause tetanus – 27 per cent of tetanus cases in North America occur in people who have not previously reported an injury.

Adults more than 60 years of age are at increased risk of tetanus infection as they may not have been immunized against the disease when they were younger, or they may have simply forgotten to keep their immunization up to date. Immigrants to Canada may also be at risk, as many would not have received tetanus immunization in their country of origin. They should check whether they need to receive full immunization against tetanus.

ROLL UP YOUR SLEEVES AND PROTECT YOURSELF

To avoid contracting tetanus while working or playing outside, follow these easy steps:

1. Ensure that your immunization is up to date
2. Get a tetanus booster every 10 years at your local clinic, doctor's office or travel clinic
3. Wear gloves, protective clothing and footwear while renovating, gardening, composting or doing yard work
4. Be careful when using tools that could cut or puncture your skin
5. If you are injured, clean wounds thoroughly and immediately with soap and warm water. Cover the wound and visit your doctor or the emergency room if it is a more serious injury

ABOUT THE CANADIAN COALITION FOR IMMUNIZATION AWARENESS & PROMOTION (CCIAP)

The Canadian Coalition for Immunization Awareness & Promotion is a coalition of 28 national organizations. Its mission is to contribute to the control, elimination and eradication of vaccine-preventable diseases in Canada by increasing awareness of the benefits and risks of immunization for all ages via education, promotion, advocacy and media relations.

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Canadians can get more information about the tetanus shot from their local public health office or by visiting the CCIAP website at www.immunize.ca. To arrange an interview with Carson Arthur or a CCIAP representative, please contact:

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