

NEWS RELEASE

THERE'S SOMETHING LURKING IN THE SOIL THIS GARDENING SEASON – AND MOST CANADIANS DON'T KNOW IT'S THERE!

~National survey shows 30 per cent of Canadians are not protected against tetanus and more than half aren't aware that tetanus bacteria are found in soil~

May 12, 2008 (OTTAWA, ON) – With the May long weekend just around the corner, many Canadians are gearing up for gardening season! But those who have not had a tetanus booster in the last 10 years could be putting themselves at risk of contracting this serious, potentially deadly disease. A recent Leger Marketing survey found that while most Canadians are aware of the tetanus shot, three in 10 said they have not received a tetanus shot in more than 10 years. To help people feel confident and protected while gardening this May long weekend, the Canadian Coalition for Immunization Awareness & Promotion (CCIAP) is calling on all Canadians to check their immunization records, and to visit their doctor or local clinic if they are due for a booster.

“Although most of us know about tetanus, and understand the importance of immunization, many people still don't realize that a booster dose is needed to keep their protection up,” said Dr. Bonnie Henry, Chair of the Canadian Coalition for Immunization Awareness & Promotion. “This disconnect shows that there is still a great deal of work to be done in protecting Canadians from diseases like tetanus. The tetanus booster is safe, effective, and free for all Canadians; so there is really no reason why anyone should be unprotected.”

CHECK YOUR IMMUNIZATION RECORD

When asked about whether they had spoken to their physician or another healthcare professional about immunizations, only 42 per cent of Canadians said they had discussed immunization with their doctor in the past five years. These findings reinforce the results of another recent Leger survey, which found that six in 10 Canadian adults do not feel knowledgeable about immunizations that are recommended for adults.

“The numbers show that Canadians need access to information about immunization from many sources. It's important to be informed, ask questions, and keep a record, to ensure you stay protected over the long term,” said Dr. Susan Bowles, Vice Chair of the Canadian Coalition for Immunization Awareness & Promotion. “With many Canadians kicking off the gardening season, the May long weekend is a great time to check your immunization record, and to visit your doctor or local clinic if you're due for a booster.”

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DIGGING DEEPER: THE FACTS ON TETANUS

Tetanus is an illness caused by a neurotoxin (or poison) made by bacteria that block normal control of nerve reflexes in the spinal column. The bacteria that make tetanus toxin are found naturally in soil, animal feces and dust, and can also be found in compost and packaged potting mixtures you may have in your garden. Tetanus bacteria usually enter the body through an open wound in the skin, such as the kind you can get by cutting yourself on sharp gardening tools or jagged objects buried in the dirt.

ROLL UP YOUR SLEEVES AND PROTECT YOURSELF

Canadians should receive a tetanus booster shot every 10 years. 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 with a booster shot every 10 years. If you're not up-to-date, visit your doctor or local health clinic, and ask for a free tetanus booster. Immigrants to Canada may also be at risk as many would not have received tetanus immunization in their country of origin and should check whether they need to receive full immunization against tetanus.

To avoid contracting tetanus in the garden or other outdoor locations, follow these easy steps:

1. Ensure that your immunization is up-to-date
2. Get a tetanus booster shot every 10 years
3. Wear gloves, protective clothing and footwear while gardening
4. If you are injured, clean wounds thoroughly and immediately with soap and warm water

ABOUT THE CANADIAN COALITION FOR IMMUNIZATION AWARENESS & PROMOTION

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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For more information, please contact your local public health office, visit the CCIAP web site at www.immunize.ca, which includes an adult immunization guide, or contact:

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