Tetanus and Diphtheria Vaccine

What you need to know before you or your child gets the vaccine

Your caregiver has suggested that you receive an immunization to prevent tetanus (*lockjaw*) and diphtheria. Tetanus and diphtheria are serious and deadly infectious diseases of the past that have been nearly wiped out by modern immunizations. Td or DT vaccines (*shots*) are the immunizations given to help prevent these illnesses. Td is the medical term for a standard tetanus dose, small diphtheria dose. DT means both in standard doses.

ABOUT THE DISEASES

Tetanus (*lockjaw*) and diphtheria are serious diseases. Tetanus is caused by a germ that lives in the soil. It enters the body through a cut or wound, often caused by a nail or broken piece of glass. You cannot catch tetanus from another person. Diphtheria spreads when germs pass from an infected person to the nose or throat of others.

Tetanus causes serious, painful spasms of all muscles. It can lead to:

- "Locking" of the muscles of the jaw and throat, so the patient cannot open his or her mouth or swallow.
- Damage to the heart muscle.

Diphtheria causes a thick coating in the nose, throat, or airway. It can lead to:

- Breathing problems.
- Kidney problems.
- Heart failure.
- Paralysis.
- Death.

ABOUT THE VACCINES

A vaccine is a shot (*immunization*) that can help prevent a disease. Vaccines have helped lower the rates of getting certain diseases. If people stopped getting vaccinated, more people would develop illnesses.
These vaccines can be used in three ways:

- As catch-up for people who did not get all their doses when they were children.
- As a booster dose every 10 years.
- For protection against tetanus infection, after a wound.

Benefits of the vaccines

Vaccination is the best way to protect against tetanus and diphtheria. Because of vaccination, there are fewer cases of these diseases. Cases are rare in children because most get a routine vaccination with DTP (Diphtheria, Tetanus, and Pertussis), DTaP (Diphtheria, Tetanus, and acellular Pertussis), or DT (Diphtheria and Tetanus) vaccines. There would be many more cases if we stopped vaccinating people. Tetanus kills about 1 in 5 people who are infected.

WHEN SHOULD YOU GET TD VACCINE?

- Td is made for people 7 years of age and older.
- People who have not gotten at least 3 doses of any tetanus and diphtheria vaccine (DTP, DTaP or DT) during their lifetime should do so using Td. After a person gets the third dose, a Td dose is needed every 10 years all through life. This is because protection fades over time. Booster shots are needed every 10 years.
- Other vaccines may be given at the same time as Td.

You may not know today whether your immunizations are current. The vaccine given today is to protect you from your next cut or injury. It does not offer protection for the current injury. An immune globulin injection may be given, if protection is needed immediately. Check with your caregiver later regarding your

immunization status.

Tell your caregiver if the person getting the vaccine:

- Has ever had a serious allergic reaction or other problem with Td, or any other tetanus and diphtheria vaccine (DTP, DTaP, or DT). People who have had a serious allergic reaction should not receive the vaccine.
- Has epilepsy or another nervous system illness.
- Has had Guillain Barre Syndrome (GBS) in the past.
- Now has a moderate or severe illness.
- Is pregnant.
- If you are not sure, ask your caregiver.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS FROM TD VACCINE?

- As with any medicine, there are very small risks that serious problems, even death, could occur after getting a vaccine. However, the risk of a serious side effect from the vaccine is almost zero.
- The risks from the vaccine are much smaller than the risks from the diseases, if people stopped getting vaccinated. Both diseases can cause serious health problems, which are prevented by the vaccine.
- Almost all people who get Td have no problems from it.

Mild problems

If mild problems occur, they usually start within hours to a day or two after vaccination. They may last 1-2 days:

- Soreness, redness, or swelling where the shot was given.
- Headache or tiredness.
- Occasionally, a low grade fever.

These problems can be worse in adults who get Td vaccine very often. Non-aspirin medicines may be used to reduce soreness.

Severe problems

These problems happen very rarely:

- Serious allergic reaction (at most, occurs in 1 in 1 million vaccinated persons). This occurs almost immediately, and is treatable with medicines. Signs of a serious allergic reaction include:
  - Difficulty breathing.
  - Hoarseness or wheezing.
  - Hives.
  - Dizziness.
- Deep, aching pain and muscle wasting in upper arm(s).

Overall, the benefits to you and your family from these vaccines are far greater than the risk.

WHAT TO DO IF THERE IS A SERIOUS REACTION:

- Call a caregiver or get the person to a doctor or emergency room right away.
- Write down what happened, the date and time it happened, and tell your caregiver.
- Ask your caregiver to file a Vaccine Adverse Event Report form or call, toll-free: (800) 822-7967

If you want to learn more about this vaccine, ask your caregiver. She/he can give you the vaccine package insert or suggest other sources of information. Also, the National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program gives compensation (*payment*) for persons thought to be injured by vaccines. For details call, toll-free: (800) 338-2382

U.S. Department Of Health And Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Immunization Program.

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