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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**WESTCHESTER COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT REMINDS RESIDENTS
TO GET REGULAR TETANUS SHOTS**

With an increase in gardening and other outdoor activities during the summer months, the Westchester County Department of Health is reminding residents to keep up-to-date with their tetanus vaccinations.

Tetanus is an acute and often fatal disease resulting from toxins produced by *Clostridium tetani* bacteria, which cause spasms and rigidity of the skeletal muscles. The Westchester County Department of Health recommends that residents speak to their physician about tetanus shots if they have never been vaccinated or if they have not received a booster shot within the last ten years.

“Most people only get a tetanus shot when they step on a rusty nail, but that is taking a chance,” said Joshua Lipsman, M.D., M.P.H., Commissioner of Health for Westchester County. “They might just as easily be infected with tetanus through a small scratch they get while gardening and which they feel is too minor to seek treatment for. By the time they realize there is a problem, it could be too late.”

Since the use of a tetanus vaccine became widespread, the number of tetanus cases in the United States has been dramatically reduced. However, a booster is required every ten years and a recent nationwide shortage of Td (adult tetanus toxoid) has meant that many adults have had to defer their routine ten-year booster shot to preserve supplies for those needing it the most. In June this year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced that supplies have been replenished sufficiently to allow resumption of the normal vaccination schedule. The Westchester County Department of Health is now advising all those who are due, or overdue, for their ten-year tetanus booster to schedule an appointment as soon as possible.

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Spores of the tetanus-causing bacteria are very common in soil and in the feces of most domestic animals and can enter the body through a wound or abrasion. Once inside, the spores germinate and begin producing the toxin that may spread to the central nervous system muscle spasms and seizures.

Symptoms appear within three to twenty-one days after infection, beginning with a stiffening of the jaw muscles commonly known as “lockjaw” and a stiff neck that is followed by rigidity of the abdominal muscles, sweating, increased blood pressure, and a fever of 100 to 102 degrees. Spasms may occur for several minutes at a time. Tetanus is fatal in 11 percent of cases and survivors may take months to fully recover.

"Those over 60 years of age are especially vulnerable to tetanus," said Dr. Lipsman. "But the primary risk factor is lack of vaccination. Tetanus almost never occurs in those who are up-to-date with their shots."

For additional information, contact the Westchester County Department of Health at (914) 813-5000, or visit or website at www.westchestergov.com/health.

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