Workers' Comp

Ask The Pharmacist: Preventing Tetanus in Workers' Compensation

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What is tetanus and how can it be prevented?

Tetanus is a serious infectious disease that can result from workplace injuries. Caused by spores of the bacterium *Clostridium tetani*, tetanus is often associated with rusty nails but these spores are found in many environments, including soil, dust and animal feces. All it takes for infection is a small cut, puncture wound, or scrape—common injuries in many workplaces.

Once the spores enter the body, they produce a toxin that attacks the nervous system. Symptoms often appear about 10 days after exposure but can take longer, with early signs including jaw cramping (commonly referred to as lockjaw) and escalating to severe muscle spasms, seizures, difficulty swallowing, fever and sweating. In extreme cases, muscle spasms can be strong enough to fracture bones. Neonatal tetanus, a form of the disease in newborns, is why infants are vaccinated early, but tetanus remains a risk for adults, especially after workplace injuries.

The best defense against tetanus is prevention through vaccination. The Tdap vaccine (tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis) is recommended for adults every 10 years or sooner if a high-risk injury occurs, such as sustaining a puncture wound on the job. Vaccination is nearly 100% effective at preventing tetanus, making it a critical part of workplace safety. Additionally, employers can mitigate risk by providing protective gear, such as gloves, and encouraging work practices that reduce exposure, like avoiding barefoot activities or proper handling of soil and debris.

Consider the individual's tetanus vaccination status when evaluating claims involving cuts, punctures or other open wounds. Prompt medical evaluation and treatment, including a booster shot if necessary, may prevent an infection from developing. Staying informed about the risk of tetanus and its prevention can help ensure better

outcomes for injured employees while mitigating potential complications in claims.

This information is meant to serve as a general overview, and any specific questions should be fully reviewed with a health care professional such as the prescribing doctor or dispensing pharmacist.

Do you have a workers' compensation or auto-related pharmacy question? Send us an email at AskThePharmacist@enlyte.com.

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References:

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