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To: Local Health Departments

From: Jeffrey P. Davis, MD, Chief Medical Officer and
State Epidemiologist for Communicable Diseases
Jeffrey P. Davis MD
Jonathan L. Temte, MD, PhD, Chair
Wisconsin Council on Immunization Practices
Jonathan L. Temte MD PhD

Re: Flood water exposure and implications for vaccinating adults

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), outbreaks of infectious diseases after a flood in the U.S. are unusual and mass immunization programs are not routinely recommended. Exposure to flood water alone is not a reason to give tetanus-containing vaccine or any other vaccine.

Tetanus Vaccine:

The need for tetanus vaccination after exposure to flood water depends on the presence of a wound, the condition of the wound and the likelihood that the injured person is susceptible to tetanus. The recommendations for use of tetanus-containing vaccine that apply during a flood are the same as those that apply at any other time. Tdap is preferred to Td for adults who have never received Tdap because immunity against pertussis wanes. Use a Tdap formulation which has been licensed for adults. Td should be used for adults previously vaccinated with Tdap and for persons ≥ 65 years of age.

- Persons with severe wounds should be evaluated by a medical provider. Those who sustain puncture wounds or wounds that may be contaminated with soil or fecal material should receive tetanus-containing vaccine if more than 5 years have elapsed since their last tetanus booster. Persons who have not completed a primary tetanus series (a minimum of 3 doses of tetanus-and diphtheria-containing vaccine) must be vaccinated and given tetanus immune globulin (TIG) as soon as possible.
- Persons who sustain clean, minor wounds should receive tetanus-containing vaccine if they have not completed a primary tetanus series or if more than 10 years have elapsed since their last tetanus booster.
- All persons should receive a tetanus booster every 10 years.

Hepatitis A vaccine:

There is no specific reason to give hepatitis A vaccine routinely during floods. No transmission of hepatitis A virus from contaminated water has been identified in the U.S. since the 1980s. Hepatitis A vaccine is not routinely recommended for sewage workers.

Hepatitis B vaccine:

Hepatitis B vaccine is recommended for people who will be providing direct patient care or who are otherwise expected to have routine contact with other people's bodily fluids in the course of their work activities. There is no special need for hepatitis B vaccination during a flood.

CC: Lori Getter, Wisconsin Emergency Management