

TETANUS

WHEN WAS YOUR LAST TETANUS SHOT?

Fish farm workers are often exposed to puncture type wounds from catfish spines. These wounds can be either from live fish in a seine or live car or from the spines of a dead catfish lying along the pond bank. Either way when one is injured, it hurts. An additional danger is infection, particularly from the dead fish's spine.

One possible infection is tetanus. Tetanus is a disease caused by a bacterium known as *Clostridium tetani*. Tetanus bacteria are found in soil, dust, and in animal wastes. Tetanus is contracted through a cut or wound that becomes contaminated with the bacteria. The bacteria can get in ones body through even a tiny pinprick or scratch, but deep puncture wounds or cuts like those from a catfish spine are especially susceptible to infection with tetanus.

Symptoms of tetanus usually begin 8 days after the infection, but may range from 3 days to 3 weeks. The most common symptom of tetanus is muscle spasm in the jaw, thus one of the common names "lockjaw". This muscle spasm of the jaw is called trismus. The spasms can spread to muscles in the abdomen, upper arms, and thighs. Other symptoms are difficulty swallowing, stiffness or pain in the muscles of the neck, shoulders, and back, fever, and profuse sweating.

Please note tetanus cannot be spread person to person and is easily prevented by vaccination. **In the United States, a combination shot, called the Td vaccine, protects against both tetanus and diphtheria. A Td booster shot is recommended every 10 years.** An adult who has never received immunization against tetanus should start with a 3 – dose primary series given over 7 – 12 months.

A post-exposure tetanus prophylaxis is also recommended. This is just a Td shot as a precaution if injured.

In summary, be careful, it is a dangerous world out there and get that Td booster if you haven't had on in the last 10 years.