



Press Release

Hamilton County Health Department

Web: health.hamiltontn.org

****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****

April 13, 2020

Health Department Warns of Tetanus during Storm Cleanup, Offers Power Outage Food Safety Recommendations, Reminds of Social Distancing

HAMILTON COUNTY, TN - The risk of injury is high during a storm and while working to clean up the aftermath. Tetanus is a potential health threat for persons who have open wounds. If you experience a cut or puncture wound, you should clean it with soap and water and consult your healthcare provider. Medical care should be sought for more serious cuts or wounds.

Those most at risk for tetanus infection include those who have never had a tetanus vaccine and those who have not stayed up to date on their 10-year tetanus booster shots.

When you experience an injury, your healthcare provider may recommend that you receive a tetanus booster if it has been more than five years since your last dose. Many health care providers, immunizing pharmacists, and the Health Department routinely offer tetanus-containing vaccines for people who need it.

In addition to immunization, wearing protective gear such as heavy gloves and sturdy shoes when handling storm debris can help prevent exposure to the bacteria.

Another potential health issue following storm power outages is food safety. Foods requiring refrigeration should always be kept at or below 40°F, or frozen at 0°F or below. During a power outage, the temperature in a refrigerator will keep food cold for about 4 hours **if the door is not opened**. A full freezer will keep food frozen approximately 48 hours (half full freezer only 24 hours) **if the door is not opened**.

Once power is restored you will need to determine the safety of your food. The following general guidelines should be followed after a power outage:

- Using an appliance thermometer is the best way to find out how cold the food has been kept. Check the temperature when the power comes back on. If the freezer thermometer reads 40°F or below, the food is safe and may be refrozen.
- If a thermometer has not been kept in the freezer, check each package of food to determine its safety. **You can't rely on appearance or odor**. If the food still contains ice crystals or is 40 °F or below, it is safe to refreeze or cook.
- Refrigerated food should be safe as long as the power was out for no more than 4 hours and the refrigerator door was kept shut. Discard any perishable food (such as meat, poultry, fish, eggs or leftovers) that has been above 40°F for two hours or more.

Contact your pharmacist if you are concerned about medications that are stored in the refrigerator.

Last night's storms also create conditions favorable to the spread of COVID-19. Recovery efforts and family displacement will put people into close proximity. The Health Department urges people to maintain social distancing as we help our neighbors through this tragedy. Maintain at least 6 feet distance from other workers when possible. Wear masks to decrease spread of the virus any time you are outside your home and around others. Those who have been displaced and are living with others should limit exposure to as few new household contacts as possible.

For more information on food safety, visit the [CDC Food Safety website](#) or call our Environmental Health Services at 209-8110.

For more information about tetanus, call your healthcare provider or the Hamilton County Health Department at 209-8383, or visit the [CDC Tetanus webpage](#).

See more storm aftermath safety tips from the [CDC here](#).

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