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TROPICAL STORM/HURRICANE INFORMATION SHEET

WOUND CARE AND PREVENTING WOUND INFECTIONS IN DISASTER EVENTS

After a hurricane, wound care and preventing infections is often a concern. The Florida Department of Health offers advice on several issues related to wounds and hurricane cleanup.

The risk of wound infection following a hurricane is raised because of interruptions in the clean water supply, electricity, and normal hygiene practices. Citizens and responders working in and around debris and flood waters may have an increased risk for wounds and infections.

Individuals using equipment that they are unfamiliar with combined with the exertion and fatigue during cleanup activities may also lead to an increase in wounds and injuries. During post-storm cleaning and recovery activities it is important to wear appropriate protective equipment, such as, gloves, work clothes, eye-protection, and heavy shoes or boots, to prevent injuries.

Individuals receiving a wound should follow three simple guidelines:

- **Clean the wound.** A thorough cleansing of the wound with soap and safe water reduces the potential for infection.
- **Apply a bandage to the wound.** Keeping the wound dry and protected will reduce the chance of infection and prevent transmission of infection to others.
- **Consult a health care provider.** If the wound becomes, red, warm to the touch, or there is pus or debris in the wound, consult a healthcare provider.

Remember, it is important to keep wounds clean, covered, and dry to help prevent infection and to seek medical care for infected wounds.

Some organisms that cause infections are resistant to a variety of antibiotics. Not properly caring for these infections can have serious consequences. It is important to understand that a type of infection called MRSA is no more prevalent after a storm or natural disaster than it was prior to the event. Any infected wounds that are not healing properly require prompt medical attention.

Finally, tetanus may be a concern. Tetanus is more of a risk during clean-up activities because of increased exposure to debris and floodwaters. Not every person needs a tetanus vaccination after a hurricane. A tetanus vaccination may be offered if:

- The individual has a wound and it has been ten (10) years since their last tetanus vaccination, or
- The individual has a wound that is particularly deep, and it has been five (5) years since the last tetanus vaccination.

For more information, please visit <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/woundcare.asp> or please contact your local county health department or visit www.doh.state.fl.us or www.FloridaDisaster.org.