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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Correction to previous release:** The Caring Vans are operated by Blue Cross Blue Shield of Oklahoma

**Tetanus shots available**

The Oklahoma City-County Health Department (OCCHD) will be offering tetanus shots today to rescue workers, volunteers and residents in tornado damaged areas. Tetanus shots are recommended for anyone who hasn't had a tetanus booster within the last ten years. OCCHD nurses will be providing the shots through Blue Cross Blue Shield Caring Vans stationed at the volunteer staging area at the Oklahoma County Barn, 7501 S. Anderson Road near I-240. Tetanus shots are also available at OCCHD, 921 NE 23<sup>rd</sup> Street in Oklahoma City.

Tetanus, also known as "lockjaw," can develop when *Clostridium tetani* bacteria enter the body through breaks in the skin. The bacteria is often found in soil, dust, and manure, and people may become infected through deep puncture wounds or cuts, like those made by nails. But the bacteria may also cause an infection even when it enters the body through even a tiny pinprick or scratch.

Tetanus is a serious disease caused when the *Clostridium tetani* bacteria produce a poison that spreads throughout the body, causing painful muscle spasms in the neck, arms, legs, and stomach. These can be strong enough to break a child's bones. Children with tetanus might have to spend several weeks in the hospital under intensive care – but the infection can be prevented with a tetanus vaccination.

## **Tornado Damage Cleanup Safety**

**Half of tornado-related injuries occur during rescue attempts and cleanup.**

Even after the weather clears, cleanup and other activities during the aftermath of tornadoes can pose safety hazards. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 50 percent of tornado-related injuries may occur during rescue attempts, cleanup, and other post-tornado activities. In one study, nearly a third of the injuries resulted from stepping on nails. Other common causes of injury included falling objects and heavy, rolling objects. Because tornadoes often damage power lines, gas lines, or electrical systems, there is a risk of fire, electrocution, or an explosion. Protecting yourself and your family requires promptly treating any injuries suffered during the storm and using extreme care to avoid further hazards.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offers this advice for anyone working in a tornado damaged area:

### **General Safety Precautions**

- Continue to monitor your battery-powered radio or television for emergency information.
- Be careful when entering any structure that has been damaged.
- Wear sturdy shoes or boots, long sleeves, and gloves when handling or walking on or near debris.
- Be aware of hazards from exposed nails and broken glass.
- Do not touch downed power lines or objects in contact with downed lines. Report electrical hazards to the police and the utility company.
- Use battery-powered lanterns, if possible, rather than candles to light homes without electrical power.
- Never use generators, pressure washers, grills, camp stoves, or other gasoline, propane, natural gas, or charcoal-burning devices inside your home, basement, garage, or camper—or even outside near an open window, door, or vent. Carbon monoxide (CO)—an odorless, colorless gas that can cause sudden illness and death if you breathe it—from these sources can build up in your home, garage, or camper and poison the people and animals inside. Seek prompt medical attention if you suspect CO poisoning and are feeling dizzy, light-headed, or nauseated.
- Respond to requests for volunteer assistance by police, fire fighters, emergency management, and relief organizations, but do not go into damaged areas unless assistance has been requested. Your presence could hamper relief efforts, and you could endanger yourself.

## **Inspecting the Damage**

- After a tornado, be aware of possible structural, electrical, or gas-leak hazards in your home. Contact your local city or county building inspectors for information on structural safety codes and standards. They may also offer suggestions on finding a qualified contractor to do work for you.
- In general, if you suspect any damage to your home, shut off electrical power, natural gas, and propane tanks to avoid fire, electrocution, or explosions.
- If you see frayed wiring or sparks, or if there is an odor of something burning, you should immediately shut off the electrical system at the main circuit breaker if you have not done so already.
- If you smell gas or suspect a leak, turn off the main gas valve, open all windows, and leave the house immediately. Notify the gas company, the police or fire departments, or State Fire Marshal's office, and do not turn on the lights, light matches, smoke, or do anything that could cause a spark. Do not return to your house until you are told it is safe to do so.

## **Injuries**

Check for injuries. Do not attempt to move seriously injured people unless they are in immediate danger of further injury. Get medical assistance immediately. If someone has stopped breathing, begin CPR if you are trained to do so. Stop a bleeding injury by applying direct pressure to the wound. Have any puncture wound evaluated by a physician. If you are trapped, try to attract attention to your location.

## **Tips for Food Safety during Power Outages**

OCCHD is also reminding people in areas with power outages that food stored in refrigerators and freezers can become unsafe to eat if the temperature exceeds 40 degrees for more than two hours. Foodborne bacteria can quickly begin to multiply in perishable food such as meat, poultry, seafood, milk, and mayonnaise. Appearance and odor are not reliable ways to tell whether the food is still safe to eat. People should never taste food to find out whether it's gone bad.

Generally, if the power is off for four hours or less, food in an unopened refrigerator will stay below 40 degrees Fahrenheit and should be fine to use. A full freezer will keep food at an acceptable temperature for about 48 hours if the freezer door remains closed. Food may also be transferred to ice chests to keep cool.

If the freezer isn't completely full, frozen food is usually safe to cook or refreeze if the power hasn't been off any longer than 24 hours. If you have an appliance thermometer in your freezer, check the temperature when the power comes back on – if it reads 40 degrees or below, the food is safe and may be refrozen. If you don't have an

appliance thermometer, check each item individually. If the food still contains ice crystals it's safe to refreeze or cook. As always, it's important that each item is thoroughly cooked to the proper temperature to ensure that any foodborne bacteria are destroyed.

But remember, even thorough cooking may not destroy all the bacteria in perishable food that's been left warmer than 40 degrees for longer than two hours. If you take a chance and eat it, you may become seriously ill.

The FoodSafety.gov website provides additional information:

<http://www.foodsafety.gov/keep/emergency/index.html>

The United States Department of Agriculture also provides guidance for various types of food. The complete list can be found at:

[http://www.fsis.usda.gov/factsheets/keeping\\_food\\_Safe\\_during\\_an\\_emergency/index.asp](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/factsheets/keeping_food_Safe_during_an_emergency/index.asp)

Additional information is also available at the Oklahoma State Department of Health website: [http://www.ok.gov/health/Coping\\_After\\_The\\_Storm.html](http://www.ok.gov/health/Coping_After_The_Storm.html)