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Attention: All News Editors

WRHA Warns Cuts and Punctures from Debris Can Lead to Deadly Tetanus and Leptospirosis

Montego Bay, Jamaica – Wednesday, December 10, 2025 — As residents across the Western Region embark on the gruelling task of cleaning up following Hurricane Melissa, the Western Regional Health Authority (WRHA) is issuing a critical warning. Cuts and punctures from debris visible and hidden in standing water now present a serious risk of life-threatening infections, namely Tetanus and Leptospirosis.

Hidden in mud and dirty water, there are numerous sharp hazards like rusted nails, broken glass, and jagged metal debris. Sustaining a puncture wound or deep cut from these items introduces the bacteria that causes Tetanus directly into the body. Additionally, the floodwaters themselves are highly likely to be contaminated with sewage and the urine of infected animals, particularly rats. Leptospirosis bacteria can enter the body through any break in the skin, including minor cuts or scratches.

Regional Technical Director, Dr. Dianne Campbell-Stennett emphasized the widespread nature of the current threat: "As a region, we have been severely impacted by Hurricane Melissa, and recovery efforts are still underway. As we continue cleanup activities, we are urging the public to remain vigilant and use appropriate heavy-duty or plastic gloves and water boots or heavy-duty thick garbage bags over shoes and feet. This is critical, as there is an increased risk of exposure to Leptospirosis, Tetanus, and other infections during post-hurricane conditions."

More crucially, injury response is key; if a nail stick, puncture wound, or significant cut is sustained during cleanup, work must be stopped immediately, the wound cleaned thoroughly with soap and clean water, and urgent medical care sought.

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Deep wounds are particularly dangerous for Tetanus, which can cause painful muscle spasms and be fatal if not treated promptly. For Leptospirosis, the initial symptoms include fever and can mimic the flu but can rapidly escalate to kidney failure, liver damage, and even death. Residents are reminded to ensure their Tetanus vaccination status is up-to-date and to maintain strict hygiene practices, including washing hands thoroughly with soap and water after any contact with flood debris, even if gloves are worn.

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