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FEATURED

Group offers free hepatitis, tetanus shots

By ELAINE ALLEN-EMRICH Staff Writer

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Bonnie Saxman, co-founder of On the Spot Aid Inc., speaks about the free Hepatitis A or B vaccines or tetanus shots event from 5-6:30 p.m. Thursday at Englewood Bible Church.

Sun photo by ELAINE ALLEN-EMRICH

ENGLEWOOD — Hepatitis A is passed from one person to another, usually through improper food handling.

That's why Bonnie Saxman and Cynthia Voortman, founders of On the Spot Aid

Inc., are helping locals get free hepatitis A vaccines.

Through the health department, free hepatitis A, B and tetanus shots are offered from 5-6:30 p.m. Thursday at Englewood Bible Church, 501 Yale St., Englewood.

Hepatitis A is usually spread through close contact with an infected person or when a person unknowingly ingests the virus from objects, food, or drinks contaminated by small amounts of stool or excrement from an infected person.

On the Spot Aid Inc. performs triage for people without housing in Englewood, North Port and Charlotte County administering first aid to people near the woods, at park benches and area camps. The nonprofit has teamed up with the Sarasota County Health Department and Englewood Bible Church to offer the free shots.

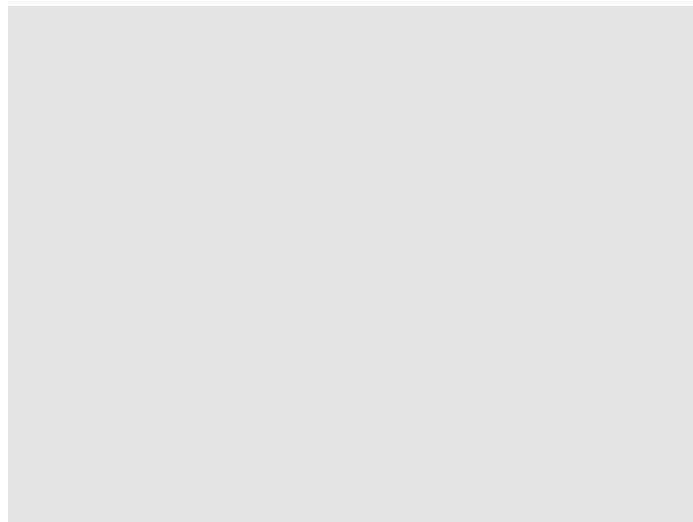
“Tetanus is found in dirt and sticks, not just rusty metal,” Voortman said. “Tetanus or lockjaw can become serious.”

The tetanus vaccine makes antibodies or special proteins in the body that help the immune system fight the toxin produced by the bacteria from the dirt or rusty metal, she said.

Saxman, a nurse who worked in the medical field for 20 years doing vaccines and

triage in disaster relief teams, founded the nonprofit with Voortman, a health care lobbyist turned paramedic five years ago.

The pair is working to prevent the people without housing from going to the hospital for infections. They say something as simple as a bug bite can quickly become infected. If the person is hospitalized and can't pay any of his medical bills, it's taxing on the medical care system.



Sometimes the unhoused use anything possible to help protect their wounds. On the Spot Aid is sponsoring free tetanus shots to help anyone who needs one.

PHOTO PROVIDED

“You would be amazed what our unhoused population will do to prevent themselves from going to the hospital or having their bike stolen,” Voortman said. “They can MacGyver anything. We’ve seen them use a mask to cover a cut on their toes. We know they are very good at trying to fix things. However, when it comes to their health and prevention, we want them to have the vaccines.”

On the Spot Inc. helped 19 unhoused campers receive COVID-19 vaccines last year because they couldn't schedule online appointments or didn't have vehicles to use the drive up clinics.

“Our clients needed COVID-19 vaccines to start work,” Voortman said. “We also set up COVID-19 clinics with the Charlotte County Health department.

“We spent several months in communication with the Sarasota Department of Health discussing the immunization needs of both housed and unhoused people in Englewood,” Voortman said. “Currently, if one of our clients needs a tetanus vaccine, the options are Publix at \$105 or Sarasota Memorial Urgent Care center at

\$297, or the Englewood Hospital ER at a cost way beyond both of these options.”

The Florida Department of Health recently sent an email to all licensed medical providers alerting them to an uptick in hepatitis A, encouraging immunocompromised and unhoused residents to seek out vaccinations, Saxman said.

Identification is needed to receive a vaccine. For more information about On The Spot Aid Inc., visit onthespotaid.com or call 941-499-4664.

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