



For Staff /Patient Education

Tetanus

LOCKJAW

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What is it?

- Tetanus is an acute, often fatal, disease caused by an exotoxin produced by the bacterium [Clostridium Tetani](#). It is characterized by generalized rigidity and convulsive spasms of skeletal muscles. The muscle stiffness usually involves the jaw (lockjaw) and neck and then becomes generalized.
- *Tetanus symptoms include:*
 - ✓ Headache
 - ✓ Jaw cramping
 - ✓ Jerking or staring (seizures)
 - ✓ Fever and sweating
 - ✓ Sudden, involuntary muscle tightening – often in the stomach (muscle spasms)
 - ✓ Painful muscle stiffness all over the body
 - ✓ Trouble swallowing
 - ✓ High blood pressure and fast heart rate
- [The incubation period](#) – time from exposure to illness – is usually 3–21 days (average 10 days), although it may range from 1 day to several months, depending on the kind of wound. Most cases occur within 14 days. In general, shorter incubation periods are seen with more heavily contaminated wounds, more severe disease, and a worse outcome of the disease (prognosis).

How is it spread?

- Tetanus is different from other vaccine-preventable diseases because [it does not spread from person to person](#).
- The bacteria can get into the body through broken skin, usually through injuries from contaminated objects. Certain breaks in the skin that are more likely to get infected with tetanus bacteria. These include: Wounds contaminated with dirt, poop (feces), or spit (saliva); Wounds caused by an object puncturing the skin, like a nail or needle (puncture wounds); Burns; Crush injuries; Injuries with dead tissue

Where is it found?

- The bacteria are usually found in soil, dust and manure and enter the body through breaks in the skin - usually cuts or puncture wounds caused by contaminated objects.

Prevention & Control:

- Being fully immunized is the best tool to prevent tetanus. Tetanus vaccines are recommended for people of all ages, with booster shots throughout life.
- Immediate and proper wound care can also help prevent infection. If you get a tetanus infection, you can still get it again someday if you're not protected by timely vaccination.
- Doctors can diagnose tetanus by examining the patient and looking for certain [signs and symptoms](#). There are no hospital lab tests that can confirm tetanus.
- Tetanus is a medical emergency requiring:
 - Hospitalization
 - Immediate treatment with human tetanus immune globulin (TIG) (or equine antitoxin)
 - [Tetanus vaccine](#)
 - Drugs to control muscle spasms
 - Aggressive wound care
 - Antibiotics
- Depending on how severe the infection is, a machine to help you breathe may be required. A tetanus vaccine should be given along with treatment .

For more information contact:



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Source:

<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/pinkbook/downloads/tetanus.pdf>



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