



Tetanus

What is Tetanus?

Tetanus (also called lockjaw) is a serious bacterial infection which may occur when tetanus bacteria get into the skin through a wound or deep cut. Tetanus bacteria can be found everywhere but is commonly found in soil, rust, dust and manure. Tetanus usually causes cramping and painful convulsions of the muscles in the neck, arms, legs and stomach

How is it spread?

The bacteria enter the body through a break in the skin. Any type of injury, such as lacerations, puncture wounds, scrapes or burns, that breaks the skin can lead to a tetanus infection if:

- Tetanus enters the body through broken skin

AND

- The person is not properly vaccinated against tetanus

Tetanus has also been linked with clean wounds, surgical wounds, insect/animal bites, dental infections, and injection drug use.

Tetanus is not spread person-to-person.

What are the symptoms?

Early symptoms of tetanus include locking of the jaw, difficulty swallowing and stiffness in the neck and abdomen. This is followed by fever, severe muscles spasms, and breathing difficulties. Complications include pneumonia, broken bones (from muscle spasms) and death.

What is the treatment for Tetanus?

Without proper hospital treatment, tetanus can be fatal. A person diagnosed with tetanus might need weeks of hospital care. Treatment is determined by the type of wound and the history of tetanus immunization. This may include treatment with an antitoxin drug, antibiotics, muscle relaxants and supportive treatment such as breathing assistance (ventilator). It can take months to recover fully from tetanus

How do I protect myself and others?

The best way to prevent tetanus is to be completely immunized. Tetanus vaccine is a part of routine childhood immunizations and is given at 2 months, 4 months, 6 months, 18 months, 4-6 years of age, 14-16 years of age and then every 10 years in adulthood. Persons with no history of tetanus immunization should start the course of vaccination to prevent tetanus in the future.

Please contact your health care provider or the [Immunization Program](#) at the health unit if you have questions about immunizations.

Clean all wounds immediately but cleaning is not a substitute for immunization. Contact your health care provider or [Health811*](#) to assess whether further medical assessment or intervention is needed.

Are there any special concerns about Tetanus?

A person who has had tetanus can get sick with it again, therefore keeping [tetanus immunization](#) up-to-date is important.

If it's been more than 10 years since you or someone in your family has had a tetanus booster, schedule a visit with a health care provider to bring immunizations up to date.

* Health811 [Health811](#) (formerly known as Telehealth Ontario and Health Connect Ontario) is a free, secure and confidential service. Ontarians can contact 24 hours a day, seven days a week for non-urgent health questions and concerns. Talk with a health professional by phone (call 811 or TTY 1-866-797-0007) or chat online through a 'chat with us' link on the website: www.Ontario.ca/Health811 (also available in French: www.Ontario.ca/Sante811).

For information call Infectious Diseases: ext. 8809.