

TETANUS

What is tetanus?

Tetanus, commonly called lockjaw, is a bacterial disease that affects the nervous system. This disease is rare in the United States.

What are the symptoms of tetanus?

Symptoms may appear in 3 to 21 days following exposure, but usually appear 8-10 days after exposure. The first sign of tetanus is usually muscular stiffness in the jaw (lockjaw). This may be followed by stiffness of the neck, difficulty swallowing, rigidity of abdominal muscles and spasms.

How is tetanus spread?

The tetanus bacteria live throughout the environment and are commonly found in soil “dirtied” or contaminated with manure. The tetanus bacteria enter the body through a wound. It is not spread from person to person.

How long are people contagious?

Persons with tetanus are not contagious; it is not spread from person to person.

Who gets tetanus?

Persons who are not up to date on vaccines are the most likely to get the disease. Tetanus occurs more often in older people who have not received adequate booster doses of vaccine. Farm or dairy workers, who have contact with manure, are also at a higher risk of getting tetanus.

What treatment is available for people with tetanus?

Clean wounds promptly and thoroughly. Dead tissue should be removed by health care personnel. If the patient has not had a tetanus toxoid booster in the previous 10 years, a single booster injection should be administered on the day of injury. For severe wounds, a booster may be given if the patient has not been previously immunized with a series of at least three doses of toxoid. In some cases, tetanus immunoglobulin may be needed.

Do infected people need to be kept home from school, work or daycare?

No. Persons may go to school, work or daycare. The wound should be kept well covered.

How can I protect myself and my family from getting tetanus?

- Keep up to date on immunizations. Diphtheria toxoid is usually combined with tetanus toxoid and pertussis vaccine to form a triple vaccine known as DTaP. This vaccine should be given at 2, 4, 6 and 15 months of age, and between 4 and 6 years of age. Everyone should also receive a combination of tetanus toxoid and diphtheria toxoid (Td) or tetanus toxoid, diphtheria toxoid and acellular pertussis (DTaP) every 10 years to maintain immunity.
- Clean wounds immediately after they occur and keep clean until completely healed.