

Tetanus

Information Sheet

What is Tetanus?

Tetanus, often referred to as “lockjaw”, is caused by bacteria that produce a toxin (poison) in the body that attacks the nervous system.

How is it spread?

People get tetanus from the environment and not from other people.

The bacteria can enter the body through a puncture wound, cut in the skin, severe burn or animal bite. An injury from a rusty nail is often blamed for tetanus. However, it is the bacteria on the nail, not the rust that causes the disease.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms include a headache, fever, crankiness, and spasms of the jaw muscles. This is followed by intense, painful muscle contractions in the neck, arms, legs, and stomach. Muscle spasms occur frequently and last for several minutes.

Symptoms occur from 3 to 21 days (usually 8 days) after infection by the bacteria.

How to prevent Tetanus:

Tetanus vaccine is recommended for all infants and children. It is given in combination with diphtheria and acellular pertussis vaccines and this combination is called DTaP vaccine.

A booster dose of combined tetanus diphtheria vaccine (called Td vaccine) is recommended every 10 years for teens and adults.

What is the treatment?

- Thoroughly clean wound or injury
- Administer appropriate antibiotics
- Tetanus toxoid and/or tetanus immune globulin may be administered based on the immunization record.