

Tetanus (Lockjaw)



Tetanus, also called lockjaw, is caused by bacteria found in dirt and enters the body through a cut in the skin, a burn, or an animal bite. The bacteria make a toxin (poison) in the body that attacks the nervous system. It may cause death especially in older persons or those who are unvaccinated.



How is it spread?

- ▶ The tetanus bacteria are found in the dirt, manure, or dust and enter the body through a cut or opening in the skin.
- ▶ Tetanus cannot be spread from person-to-person.



What are the signs and symptoms?

Tetanus is a painful disease that may lead to breathing problems and severe muscle spasms that can be strong enough to break a person's bones. It may cause death especially in patients 60 years or older or those who are unvaccinated.

Early symptoms include:

- ▶ Headache
- ▶ Fever
- ▶ Spasms of the jaw and muscles

Later symptoms include:

- ▶ Stiffness in the neck and jaw
- ▶ Difficulty swallowing
- ▶ Painful muscle spasms that occur frequently and last several minutes



What are the treatment options?

For tetanus, there is a specific treatment that involves the use of the following:

- ▶ Tetanus immune globulin (TIG)
- ▶ Vaccination with the tetanus vaccine
- ▶ Wound management



How can it be prevented?

The best way to prevent tetanus is to get vaccinated!

- ▶ Tetanus vaccine is given with diphtheria vaccine and sometimes acellular pertussis (whooping-cough) vaccine. There are four vaccines available that prevent tetanus: DTaP, DT, Td, and Tdap.
- ▶ The type of vaccine given depends on the patient's age and health.
- ▶ Talk to your doctor about what is recommended for you.

