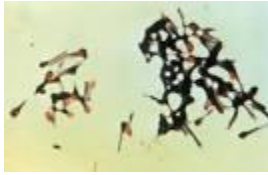


Fact Sheet

Tetanus

What is Tetanus?



Tetanus is an infection caused by bacteria called *Clostridium tetani* that affects the nervous system and causes painful, uncontrolled muscle spasms. Tetanus is uncommon in the United States, with an average of 29 reported cases per year from 1996 through 2009. Nearly all cases of tetanus are among people who have never received a tetanus vaccine, or adults who don't stay up to date on their 10-year booster shots.

How is it Spread?

Tetanus is different from other vaccine-preventable diseases because it does not spread from person to person. Tetanus bacteria are everywhere in the environment, including soil, dust, and manure.

The bacteria can get into the body through broken skin, usually through injuries from contaminated objects. Certain breaks in the skin are more likely to get infected with tetanus bacteria and include:

- § Wounds contaminated with dirt, feces, or saliva
- § Wounds caused by an object puncturing the skin, like a nail or needle (puncture wounds)
- § Burns
- § Crush injuries
- § Injuries with dead tissue

Tetanus has also been linked to clean superficial wounds, surgical procedures, insect bites, dental infections, compound fractures, chronic sores and infections, and intravenous (IV) drug use.

Signs and symptoms

When the tetanus bacteria invade the body through a wound, they produce a toxin, or poison, that causes muscles to become tight, which is very painful. Tetanus mainly affects the neck and abdomen. Tetanus is also known as "lockjaw" because it often causes a person's neck and jaw muscles to lock, making it hard to open the mouth or swallow. It also can cause breathing problems, severe muscle spasms, and seizure-like movements. Complete recovery can take months. If left untreated, tetanus can be fatal.

Diagnosis

Doctors diagnose tetanus based on a physical exam, medical and immunization history, and the signs and symptoms of muscle spasms, stiffness and pain. Laboratory tests generally aren't helpful for diagnosing tetanus.

Treatment

Since there is no cure for tetanus, treatment consists of wound care, medications to ease symptoms and supportive care.

Prevention

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.



People at Risk

Not obtaining the tetanus vaccine or a tetanus vaccine booster puts individuals at a higher risk for tetanus.



For more sources of information on this topic visit:

ST. CLAIR COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT www.scchealth.co

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES www.michigan.gov/mdhhs

CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION www.cdc.gov

MAYO CLINIC www.mayoclinic.org