



TETANUS FACT SHEET

What is tetanus?

Tetanus is a bacterial disease that causes severe muscle spasms. This disease can be fatal. However in the United States, because of vaccination for tetanus, the disease rarely occurs.

How can you be exposed to tetanus?

The bacteria that cause tetanus are found in soil and animal or human feces. When the bacteria are introduced into a deep wound, it can produce a toxin (poison) that affects the nervous system.

If you have a wound, what should you do to prevent tetanus?

- wash all wounds thoroughly
- serious wounds may need immediate medical attention
- your doctor will determine if you will need tetanus vaccine or immune globulin

What are the symptoms of tetanus?

If the wound is not properly cared for, the following symptoms of tetanus may occur:

- muscular stiffness in the jaw (lockjaw)
- problems with swallowing
- painful muscle spasms

How soon after infection do symptoms occur?

Most people will begin to have symptoms within 8 days but may range from 3 days to 3 weeks after a wound is contaminated with the tetanus bacteria.

What is the treatment for tetanus?

If symptoms of tetanus develop, treatment for the disease would include:

- high doses of tetanus immune globulin (TIG) or antitoxin
- antibiotics and/or muscle relaxants
- treatment of symptoms, such as breathing assistance

What can be done to prevent tetanus?

The best way to prevent tetanus is to make sure that you and your children's shots are up to date. For protection against tetanus, the childhood series of DTP (diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis) should start at age 2 months and continued at 4, 6 and 15-18 months of age with a booster at 4 to 6 years of age. Because immunity fades over time, an additional tetanus booster is recommended every 10 years.

Where can I get more information?

www.cdc.gov

www.dshs.state.tx.us

Source of Information

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

Rev. June 2016