

Tetanus General Information

What is tetanus?

Tetanus is a serious, sometimes fatal, disease of the central nervous system. It is caused by infection of a wound with spores of the bacterium *Clostridium tetani*.

Who can get tetanus?

Anyone can get tetanus. The spores live in the soil. If they enter the body through a wound, they can multiply and produce a poison that affects the nerves controlling muscle activity.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms may include:

- stiffness of the jaw (commonly known as lockjaw), which makes it difficult to open the mouth
- stiffness of stomach and back muscles and contraction of facial muscles
- rapid pulse, slight fever, and severe sweating
- painful muscle spasms as the disease progresses – if they affect the chest and airways, the person can suffocate

What is the treatment?

For treatment, see your doctor immediately.

How can you prevent tetanus?

Tetanus can be prevented with routine immunization. All children and adults should be immunized according to the Nova Scotia immunization schedule. Tetanus can also be prevented by thorough cleaning of cuts and wounds. Wash carefully with lots of soap and water and apply disinfectant. If you are injured, you may need tetanus vaccine or tetanus immune globulin. See your physician for an assessment. If your tetanus vaccine is not up to date, see your physician for an assessment.