



PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

**Boston Public Health Commission
Communicable Disease Control Division
1010 Massachusetts Avenue
Boston, MA 02118
Phone: 617-534-5611 Fax: 617-534-5905**

Tetanus

What is tetanus?

Tetanus, sometimes referred to as “lockjaw,” is a disease caused by bacteria that produces a toxin in the body. This toxin attacks the nervous system, resulting in muscle spasms.

How is tetanus spread?

The bacteria that cause tetanus, *Clostridium tetani* are found in soil, manure and dust. The bacteria can enter the body through a puncture wound, a cut in the skin, a severe burn or an animal bite. For example, a puncture from a rusty nail, which has bacteria on it, can cause the disease. Tetanus cannot be spread from person-to-person. People get tetanus from the environment and not from other people.

Who gets tetanus?

Tetanus cases in the United States are very rare. Tetanus can occur in people of any age who have not been immunized against it. In the United States, vaccination to protect against tetanus is given as part of routine childhood immunizations.

What are the symptoms of tetanus?

Symptoms of tetanus may include headache, fever, crankiness, and spasms of different muscles. These muscle contractions can occur in the neck, arms, legs, jaw and stomach, and can be intense and painful. They occur frequently and can last for several minutes.

What is the treatment for tetanus?

Supportive care, such as IV fluids, is required for treatment of tetanus. In addition there is specific treatment that uses tetanus immune globulin (TIG is an injection that contains antibodies against the tetanus toxin), antibiotics, wound management, sedation. Tetanus diphtheria vaccine (Td) is also given.

Can tetanus be prevented?

Yes tetanus is a preventable disease. Tetanus vaccine, usually given in combination with diphtheria and acellular pertussis vaccines called DTaP vaccine, is recommended for all infants and children. Doses of vaccine are recommended at 2 months, 4 months, 6 months, 15-18 months and 11-18 years of age. After initial vaccination, a booster dose of Td vaccine is recommended every 10 years thereafter. People who have an injury such as a cut or puncture wound may need an additional Td booster.

**For more information, please contact
Boston Public Health Commission
Communicable Disease Control
(617) 534-5611 or www.bphc.org**