

What is tetanus?

Tetanus is a disease caused by a toxin formed by the bacteria *Clostridium tetani*. It grows without oxygen at the site of an injury and has a short and relatively severe course that is often fatal.

What are the symptoms of a tetanus infection?

The illness is characterized by painful muscle contractions, especially stiffness and convulsive spasms of the jaw and neck muscles and the upper body or trunk muscles. A common first sign of tetanus in older children and adults is painful stiffness of stomach muscles.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Illness usually starts in 3 - 21 days, although it may occur as soon as 1 day depending on the type and location of the wound; the average is 10 days. A shorter time to illness is associated with a dirtier wound and more severe illness.

How does tetanus spread?

Tetanus spores are introduced into the body, usually through a puncture wound dirty with soil or animal or human feces. They may also be introduced through cuts, scraps, burns and trivial or unnoticed wounds, or by infected, contaminated street drugs. Tetanus may follow elective surgery, ear infections, or dental infection. Tetanus is not spread from human to human.

Who gets tetanus?

Anyone may get the illness, regardless of age. If a person has suffered a wound or injury and has not been adequately immunized against tetanus and received a booster shot every ten years, tetanus may occur. Most current cases occur in older adults who have not gotten a booster shot every 10 years to maintain protection.

For how long is a person infectious?

There is no infectious period because tetanus is not spread from person-to-person. Tetanus is the only vaccine-preventable disease that is not contagious.

What is the treatment for this illness?

Antibiotics play almost no role in the treatment of tetanus. Other drugs may be used by the healthcare provider.

Do infected people need to be excluded from school, work, or child care?

No, tetanus is not spread from person-to-person.

What can be done to help prevent the spread of tetanus?

Tetanus can be prevented by vaccination and keeping that protection up-to-date with a booster shot every 10 years.