



# TETANUS

Tetanus is a bacterium that lives in the soil and can enter the body through a cut or wound. The bacteria produce a poisonous substance – exotoxin – that causes the clinical illness.

## **Who gets this disease?**

Tetanus occurs almost exclusively in unimmunized or inadequately immunized persons. Previously having tetanus does not result in immunity to subsequent infections. Vaccination is required after initial recovery.

## **How is it spread?**

Unlike other vaccine-preventable diseases, tetanus is not spread from person-to-person. It occurs when the bacterium in soil or dust is introduced into the body through a wound.

## **What are the symptoms?**

The poisonous exotoxin produced by the *Clostridium tetani* bacteria causes muscles to go into spasms of the face/neck, abdomen, or area where the initial infection occurred. Paralysis and death can result. Sometimes tetanus is called “lockjaw”.

## **How can Tetanus be prevented?**

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommends immunizing children against tetanus – along with diphtheria and pertussis – beginning as early as six weeks of age. The diphtheria-tetanus-acellular pertussis (DTaP) vaccine is **required** for both childcare and school attendance. The five dose series should be completed at 2 months, 4 months, 6 months, and 15-18 months, and 4-6 years of age

Tdap/Tetanus diphtheria and acellular pertussis should be given once between the ages of 11-18 years. Booster doses of tetanus-diphtheria toxoid (Td) vaccine every 10 years after finishing the childhood primary immunization series are necessary to maintain protection against tetanus. Tdap is available as a one time dose for adults who have not recently received a tetanus vaccine. Also, it is important to be sure that all cuts, scrapes and puncture wounds are cleaned well with soap and water. Consult your healthcare provider for need of tetanus vaccine after a wound.

## **Who should be excluded?**

There is no need for the child or the childcare worker to be excluded as tetanus is not spread from person-to-person.

## **Reportable?**

Yes, tetanus is reportable by New Hampshire law to the Division of Public Health Services, Bureau of Infectious Disease Control at (603) 271-4496.