

# Tetanus

## What is Tetanus?

Tetanus is different from other vaccine-preventable diseases because it does not spread from person to person. Tetanus can be found mostly in the ground like dust, soil, and manure. Tetanus enters the body through breaks in the skin like cuts or puncture wounds caused by contaminated objects.

## What kind of germ is Tetanus?

Tetanus is a bacterium called *Clostridium tetani*. The bacteria can cause painful muscle contractions. Tetanus is also known as “lockjaw”.

## How can Tetanus be diagnosed?

Symptoms of Tetanus include jaw cramping, involuntary muscle tightening, headache, fever and sweating, and changes in blood pressure and fast heart rate.

## How can Tetanus be treated?

Tetanus is a medical emergency that requires care in the hospital, immediate treatment with medicine, aggressive wound care, drugs to control muscle spasms, antibiotics and a tetanus vaccination.

## Are there any long-term effects of Tetanus?

Intensive care to cure tetanus is always required if infected. Sometimes a machine may be needed to help you breathe.

## How can humans get Tetanus?

The spores can get into the body through broken skin, usually through injuries from contaminated objects. Tetanus bacteria are more likely to infect certain breaks in the skin. These include: Wounds contaminated with dirt, poop (feces), or spit (saliva), wounds caused by an object puncturing the skin (puncture wounds), like a nail or needle, burns, crush injuries, and injuries with dead tissue.

Other Ways Tetanus Gets into Your Body:

Tetanus bacteria can also infect the body through breaks in the skin caused by:

Clean superficial wounds (when only the topmost layer of skin is scraped off)

Surgical procedures

Insect bites

Dental infections

Compound fractures (a break in the bone where it is exposed)

Chronic sores and infections

Intravenous (IV) drug use

Intramuscular injections (shots given in a muscle)

## **Prevention of Tetanus**

Vaccination and good wound care are important to help prevent tetanus infection. Doctors can also use a medicine to help prevent tetanus in cases where someone is seriously hurt and doesn't have protection from tetanus vaccines.