



FACT SHEET

Tetanus

What is it?

- Tetanus is a serious, sometimes fatal, disease of the central nervous system that is caused by an infection of a wound with spores of the bacterium, *Clostridium tetani*. They can multiply and produce a toxin that affects the nerves that control muscle activity.

What are the symptoms?

- The most common symptom is stiffness of the jaw, commonly known as *lockjaw*. This makes it difficult to open the mouth.
- Other symptoms include stiffness of abdominal and back muscles and contractions (spasms) of facial muscles.
- Sometimes a fast pulse, slight fever, and severe sweating may occur.
- Eventually painful muscle spasms develop. If they affect the chest and airways, the person can suffocate.

Prevention

- Tetanus can be prevented with a vaccine. Children who are less than 7 years of age can receive a DTaP vaccine – a combined vaccine against diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis (whooping cough). Teenagers and adults should receive booster doses of TD vaccine, a combined vaccine against tetanus and diphtheria every 10 years.

What should I do if I get a puncture injury?

- Minor wounds: Clean the wound thoroughly with soap and warm water. Leave the wound uncovered, if possible

- Severe injuries: See a health care provider for evaluation and treatment (stitches, antibiotics, or a Td booster shot).
- Pay attention to any signs of infection such as redness or warmth of the wound, swelling, tenderness, or fever. If signs of infection develop, consult your health care provider.

If I am injured, how do I know if I need a tetanus shot?

- For a **minor injury** – Get a tetanus shot if your last tetanus shot was over 10 years ago.
- For a **complicated or contaminated wound (including puncture wounds)** – Get a tetanus shot if your last tetanus shot was over 5 years ago.

Where can I get a tetanus shot?

- Most health care providers give tetanus shots.
- Your local health department
- Hospital emergency rooms.

Report all cases to El Paso Department of Public Health by calling 915-771-5810