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Tetanus (lockjaw)

What is tetanus?

Tetanus or lockjaw is a vaccine-preventable bacterial infection that affects the nervous system.

What are the symptoms of tetanus?

Common symptoms include muscular stiffness in the jaw, followed by neck stiffness, difficulty swallowing, and rigidity of abdominal muscles, spasms, sweating, and fever.

How soon do symptoms appear after infection and is it contagious?

The incubation period ranges from 3-21 days, usually about 8 days. In general, the further the injury site is from the brain or spine, the longer it takes for symptoms to occur. In neonatal tetanus, symptoms usually appear from 4-14 days after birth.

Tetanus is the only vaccine-preventable disease that is infectious but not contagious. Tetanus is not transmitted from person to person.

How is tetanus spread?

The tetanus organism is hard to kill and can be found in soil, street dust and animal or human feces. Typically, tetanus is transmitted through open wounds. The tetanus organism produces a poison that attacks the body. You can also get tetanus following ear and tooth infections or animal bites

How can I get more information on tetanus?

For more information on tetanus or any other health issues, call the Sedgwick County Health Department Epidemiology Office at 660-7392.
Or visit www.sedgwickcounty.org.

What is the treatment for tetanus?

All wounds should be cleaned thoroughly and dead tissue should be removed. Wounded individuals who have not had a tetanus booster in the past 10 years should get the booster injection the same day of the injury.

How can you prevent tetanus?

The best way to prevent tetanus is to be vaccinated against it. Tetanus vaccine can be obtained from the Sedgwick County Health Department. Infants and children should receive five doses of the vaccine. The first vaccine should be given at two months of age with the last of the five infant/child doses given around age six years. A tetanus booster shot is recommended for adults every 10 years.