



## Tetanus



### Overview

This is a serious illness also known as "lockjaw." It's a bacterial infection that causes muscles all over your body to tighten and spasm. It's a medical emergency.

### Causes

Tetanus is caused by a bacteria called "Clostridium." It lives in soil, animal feces, dust and saliva. It can get into your body through a skin wound (usually a cut or a puncture). Once it's inside you, it makes a toxin that spreads through your blood. This toxin affects the nerves that control your muscles.

### Symptoms

Most people start noticing symptoms within a few weeks of infection. You may have a headache, fever and sweating. Your blood pressure and heart rate may change. Muscles all over your body may feel stiff and painful. You may have muscle spasms, especially in your stomach. Your jaw may cramp. You may have seizures. Without treatment, a tetanus infection can lead to severe complications. This can include life-threatening breathing problems.

### Prevention and Treatment

Tetanus is prevented with immunization. It's one of the vaccines recommended for all babies. It's important to get regular booster shots throughout your life. If you aren't immunized and you do get tetanus, you will need to be treated in a hospital.