

Do You Need Tetanus Shot?

With spring time here, many people are eager to start digging in their gardens. With gardening comes the risk of tetanus. Tetanus, sometimes called lockjaw, is a rare disease caused by bacteria known as *Clostridium tetani*. A toxin produced by the bacteria affects the function of the nerves and leads to severe muscle spasms in the abdomen, neck, stomach and extremities. Tetanus can either be localized to one part of the body or generalized with muscle spasms throughout the body. The disease has been called lockjaw since the muscle spasms in the face and neck can lead to the inability to open the mouth. This is one of the most common symptoms of tetanus. Tetanus is a serious disease that is fatal in up to 30% of cases.

The bacteria that causes tetanus can be found in soil, manure or dust. They infect humans by entering the body through cuts or puncture wounds, especially when the wound area is dirty. Animal bites, burns and non-sterile injection of drugs can also lead to infection with the bacteria. The first symptoms of tetanus can appear any time from three days to weeks after infection, but the average time until symptom onset is eight days.

The tetanus vaccine is a toxoid, which means it protects against the toxin the bacteria produces. Developed in the 1920's, tetanus vaccination became routinely used as a part of childhood immunizations in the U.S. after World War II. It is considered to be 100% effective in preventing tetanus.

If it has been more than ten years since your last tetanus booster, you should bring your immunizations up to date by receiving the vaccine. A booster vaccination is also recommended if you sustain a deep, contaminated wound and more than five years have passed since the last dose.

Serious adverse reactions from the tetanus shot are very rare. Mild reactions include localized swelling, tenderness and redness at the injection site that usually lasts one or two days. A cool compress or analgesics can relieve the soreness.

Tetanus shots are available at PharmaCare. For more information or to schedule an appointment to receive this vaccine, contact Lisa Bohrer, R.N., BC, Vaccine Specialist for PharmaCare at 301-689-2909.

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