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Tetanus

Tetanus is a serious disease caused by bacteria. Tetanus is different from other vaccine preventable diseases because it does not spread from person to person. The bacteria are usually found in soil, dust and manure and enter the body through breaks in the skin, usually cuts or puncture wounds caused by contaminated objects. Certain breaks in the skin that are more likely to get infected with tetanus bacteria are:

- Wounds contaminated with dirt, feces or saliva
- Wounds caused by an object puncturing the skin such as a nail
- Burns
- Crush injuries
- Injuries with dead tissue.

Tetanus has also been linked to clean superficial wounds, surgical procedures, insect bites, dental infections, compound fractures, chronic sores and infections and IV drug use. The incubation period is usually 3-21 days with most occurring in 14 days. Shorter incubation periods are seen with more heavily contaminated wounds, more severe disease and a worse outcome of the disease.

Tetanus symptoms include:

- Headache
- Jaw cramping
- Sudden, involuntary muscle tightening – often in the stomach
- Painful muscle stiffness all over the body
- Difficulty swallowing
- Jerking or staring
- Fever and sweating
- High blood pressure and fast heart rate.

Today, tetanus is uncommon in the United States, with an average of 29 reported cases per year from 1996 through 2009. Nearly all cases of tetanus are among people who have never received a tetanus vaccine, or adults who don't stay up to date on their 10 year booster shots. Being fully immunized is the best tool to prevent tetanus. Tetanus vaccines are recommended for people of all ages, with booster shots throughout life. For more information, visit www.cdc.gov.

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