

Tetanus

What Is Tetanus?

Tetanus is a serious disease, which remains one of the leading causes of death from infections in the world. Although rare in the U.S., there are still 50-100 cases per year and the mortality rate remains high. The disease is caused by a neurotoxin (called tetanospasmin) produced by a bacteria named *Clostridium tetani*. Any wound or infection is a potential source of growth for this bacteria. Although tetanus is believed to be completely preventable with regular immunization, a tetanus vaccination will not prevent the disease once any symptoms have begun. The most recent death in Oregon from tetanus occurred in an 84-year-old gardener in 1996.

Why Do I Need A Tetanus Vaccination?

Vaccination for tetanus produces immunity to the neurotoxin for a temporary period of time. The Communicable Disease Center for the U.S. Public Health Service currently recommends that everyone receive an initial vaccination as a child and a booster vaccination every 10 years. People who have a contaminated wound should receive a booster if it has been more than five years since their last one.

What If I Had A Tetanus Shot When I Was Younger?

The great majority of tetanus cases in the United States now occur in people who were originally vaccinated but have not had their booster every 10 years. More than half of the cases of tetanus in the U.S. are in people over the age of 40. Currently, it is estimated that as many as 30-70% of older Americans may lack protective levels of tetanus antibodies. Unlike some other vaccines such as polio, vaccination for tetanus does not produce lifelong immunity and must be repeated every 10 years to be effective.

What If I Can't Remember When I Had My last Tetanus Vaccination?

Your doctor's office will have this information (if they gave you your last tetanus vaccination) and can verify the date with a telephone call. If it has been more than five years and you cannot remember or confirm the date, it is recommended that your tetanus vaccination be repeated. It is much safer to have it too often than not often enough.

Are There Any Risks With Tetanus Vaccination?

Tetanus vaccinations have been available since World War I and have become very safe over years of development. Minor local reactions such as a sore arm for 1-2 days are not uncommon, but serious local or systemic reactions are rare.

Where Can I Get a Tetanus Vaccination?

Tetanus boosters are not expensive and can be given by our office. You do not need an appointment for this injection but we do recommend that you call first to make sure one of our nurses is available. You can also have your vaccination done at the Lane County Public Health Department or at your work if this service is available.