

## UNDERSTANDING THE RISKS

# Getting Tetanus vs. Getting Vaccinated

(LOCKJAW)



We all want to make the best health choices for our children. So how risky is tetanus compared to the vaccines that prevent tetanus?

## TETANUS (LOCKJAW) FAST FACTS



### HOW CONTAGIOUS?

**Not contagious.** The bacteria that cause tetanus live in dust, soil, and manure.<sup>1,2,3</sup>



### HOW SERIOUS?

**Very serious.** Tetanus is an acute bacterial infection that typically requires hospitalization and can lead to death.<sup>1,4</sup>

**Hospitalization:** Almost always required<sup>1,4</sup>

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**Death:** 1–2 in 10 people die even with treatment; without treatment, 1 in 4 people die.<sup>4,5</sup>

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**Nearly all cases of tetanus are in people who are not fully vaccinated or who have not gotten their booster vaccine.<sup>1,4</sup>**

## VACCINE FAST FACTS



### HOW EFFECTIVE?

The vaccines that protect against tetanus (DTaP and Tdap) are nearly 100% effective when the vaccine series is complete. A tetanus booster is required for adults every 10 years.<sup>2,6,7</sup>



### SAFETY RECORDS

Vaccines to prevent tetanus started being given to children in the 1940s.<sup>2,8</sup>



### HOW SAFE?

Safety reviews found no unexpected safety concerns for children.<sup>8</sup>



### MYTH BUSTER

Can tetanus be prevented by cleaning a wound? No. The only thing that can prevent tetanus is a tetanus vaccine.<sup>1,9</sup>



**Five separate safety systems continuously monitor all vaccines for as long as the vaccines are given.<sup>10</sup>**

Learn more at [hhs.gov/immunization/basics/safety/index.html](https://hhs.gov/immunization/basics/safety/index.html).

## COMPARING THE TWO

TETANUS	VACCINES TO PREVENT TETANUS
<p><b>Common Mild to Moderate Symptoms and Common Side Effects<sup>1,2,4,5,6,7,8</sup></b></p> <p>Tetanus develops 3 to 21 days after being exposed to the bacteria that causes it. Tetanus is a serious medical emergency that requires hospitalization. Common symptoms of tetanus last for several weeks to months and can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Jaw cramping</li><li>• Painful muscle spasms and stiffness</li><li>• Seizures</li><li>• Trouble swallowing</li><li>• Headache</li><li>• High blood pressure and fast heart rate</li><li>• Fever and sweating</li></ul>	<p>Common side effects of vaccines to prevent tetanus are usually mild and last 1–3 days. If side effects occur, they can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Soreness, redness, or swelling where the vaccine was given</li><li>• Low-grade fever and chills</li><li>• Being fussy</li><li>• Loss of appetite</li><li>• Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, or stomachache</li><li>• Feeling tired</li></ul>

## Rare, More Serious Symptoms or Complications and Rare Side Effects

1,2,4,5,6,7,11,12,13

Serious symptoms or complications of tetanus vary and can include:

- Trouble breathing
- Broken bones
- Pulmonary embolism (blood clots in the lung)
- Pneumonia

Serious side effects of vaccines to prevent tetanus vary and can include:

- High fever
- Crying for 3+ hours
- Very small risk of seizures caused by fever if DTaP vaccine is given at the same time as another vaccine
- Severe allergic reaction (generally, for every 1 million vaccines administered in the United States, only about 1–2 doses result in a severe allergic reaction)

Sources:

1. Harvard Medical School: [https://www.health.harvard.edu/a\\_to\\_z/tetanus-a-to-z](https://www.health.harvard.edu/a_to_z/tetanus-a-to-z)
2. Immunize.org: <https://www.immunize.org/wp-content/uploads/catg.d/p4220.pdf>
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): <https://www.cdc.gov/tetanus/causes>
4. CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/tetanus/hcp/clinical-overview/index.html>
5. Penn Medicine: <https://www.pennmedicine.org/for-patients-and-visitors/patient-information/conditions-treated-a-to-z/tetanus>
6. CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccine-safety/vaccines/dtap-tdap.html>
7. CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd/dtap-tdap-td/hcp/about-vaccine.html>
8. CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/pinkbook/hcp/table-of-contents/chapter-21-tetanus.html>
9. CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/tetanus/about>
10. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS): <https://www.hhs.gov/immunization/basics/safety/index.html>
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12. HHS: <https://www.hhs.gov/immunization/basics/safety/side-effects/index.html>
13. Journal of Allergic and Clinical Immunology: [https://www.jacionline.org/article/S0091-6749\(15\)01160-4/fulltext](https://www.jacionline.org/article/S0091-6749(15)01160-4/fulltext)