TETANUS

Commonly known as lockjaw, tetanus is a severe disease that causes stiffness and spasms of the muscles. Unlike other vaccine-preventable diseases, which are transferred from person to person, tetanus bacteria are found in places such as soil/dirt, dust, and manure, and can therefore never be eradicated. They enter the body through any break in the skin, such as a cut or a puncture wound. A person can also be infected after a burn or animal bite.

There’s no cure for tetanus. Treatment focuses on managing complications until the effects of the tetanus toxin resolve. Fatality is highest in individuals who haven’t been immunized.

SYMPTOMS

Common signs and symptoms of tetanus, in order of appearance, are:
- Spasms and stiffness in jaw muscles
- Stiffness of neck muscles
- Difficulty swallowing
- Stiffness of abdominal muscles
- Painful body spasms lasting for several minutes, typically triggered by minor occurrences, such as a draft, loud noise, physical touch or light

PREVENTION

Vaccination is the most effective way to prevent tetanus. The tetanus vaccine, DTaP, also protects children from diphtheria and pertussis. The adolescent and adult version of this vaccine is known as Tdap. When tetanus is just combined with diphtheria, the vaccine is called Td.

For the best protection against tetanus, your children need to receive all of the five recommended doses of the DTaP vaccine. Booster doses of Tdap and Td are needed for adolescents and adults. To see if your children are up-to-date on their vaccines, look at the CDC’s immunization schedule and talk to your healthcare provider.

For more information, visit vaccinateyourbaby.org.