

# Tetanus - What You Need to Know

## What is tetanus?

- Tetanus (also called “lockjaw”) is a serious, often deadly disease caused by bacteria.
- The bacteria produce a toxin that causes painful tightening of the muscles, usually all over the body. This can lead to “locking” of a person’s jaw so they cannot open their mouth or swallow.
- Symptoms can also include headache, fever, seizures, and changes in blood pressure and heart rate.
- Tetanus is spread by contact with contaminated objects and substances, usually through broken skin.

## How can we prevent tetanus?

**The DTaP and Tdap vaccines protect against diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis.**

### Infants and children

Infants and children should get one dose of the DTaP vaccine at the following ages:

- 2 months
- 4 months
- 6 months
- 15 -18 months
- 4 - 6 years

### Teens

Adolescents should receive one dose of the Tdap vaccine at age 11 or 12.

*In Colorado, the final dose of the DTaP vaccine is required before entry to kindergarten, and the Tdap vaccine is required before entry to 6th grade.*

### Pregnant people

Pregnant people should receive one dose of the Tdap vaccine with each pregnancy at 27 - 36 weeks.

### Adults

Adults who have never received a dose of Tdap should get one. Adults should then get a booster dose of Tdap every 10 years.

*While everyone should be vaccinated for pertussis, some, like those who’ve had allergic reactions to previous pertussis vaccines or who have certain health conditions, may not be able to be vaccinated.*

*Parents should ensure everyone who’s around their infant are up to date with pertussis vaccinations and boosters. This helps protect newborns while they are too young to get pertussis vaccines.*

**No vaccine is 100% effective. You can still get tetanus even if you’ve been vaccinated. However, vaccinated people usually have much milder infections than unvaccinated people.**



**Flip over to read about the risks of tetanus infection.**



## What are the risks of tetanus?

Unlike most vaccine-preventable diseases, tetanus is not a disease that you catch from someone else. **Tetanus bacteria live in our environment**, including in soil and dust, and usually enter the body through a scrape or cut. Complications from tetanus include:

- Fractures (broken bones)
- Tightening of the vocal cords
- Blood clots in the lungs
- Lung infection

Once tetanus has spread throughout the body, there is also a chance of death. In fact, **10 – 20% of cases are fatal**. Tetanus infection does not lead to immunity. People who survive a tetanus infection can get reinfected. Vaccination is the best way to protect against tetanus.

Tetanus is extremely dangerous for pregnant people and newborn babies. Also at greater risk are people aged 60 and older, people with diabetes, and people with a history of immunosuppression.

*Have questions about pertussis or DTaP and Tdap vaccines? Talk with your healthcare provider, pharmacist, or community health center.*

**Routine vaccines like DTaP and Tdap are essential in keeping our communities protected from dangerous diseases like tetanus.**

**Find free and low-cost vaccine providers near you:  
<https://cdphe.colorado.gov/find-free-low-cost-vaccine-provider>**

#KeepCOHealthy

### Sources

- <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd/dtap-tdap-td/public/index.html>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vac-gen/side-effects.htm>

[www.ImmunizeColorado.org](http://www.ImmunizeColorado.org) | [www.ImmunizeforGood.com](http://www.ImmunizeforGood.com)

