

# TETANUS

## Disease Overview

Tetanus is an acute illness caused by the toxin of the tetanus bacillus, *Clostridium tetani*, and is found worldwide. Tetanus is a vaccine preventable disease.

## Symptoms

In classic tetanus there are painful muscle contractions, primarily of the jaw and neck and secondarily of the trunk muscles. Symptoms include muscular rigidity and painful spasms.

## Reservoir

The natural reservoir is horses and other animal species. Tetanus spores are found in soil contaminated with animal faeces.

## Mode of Transmission

Human infection is usually by introduction of spores into the body through a puncture wound contaminated with soil or animal faeces. Tetanus infection could follow surgical procedures, especially when performed under unhygienic conditions.

## Incubation period

Usually 3-21 days. Incubation period could range from 1 day to several months depending on site of wound and extent of contamination.

## Period of communicability

Direct person to person transmission does not occur.

## Risk Factors

Increased risk for acquiring/severe illness:

- Intravenous drug use
- Occupational hazard for workers in contact with soil, sewage and domestic animals

## Surveillance Case Definition

### Confirmed Case

- Clinical evidence of illness (characterized by acute onset of hypertonia and/or painful muscular contractions, usually of the muscles of the jaw and neck, and generalized muscle spasms without other apparent medical cause) without other apparent medical cause with or without isolation of *Clostridium tetani* and with or without history of injury,

## Diagnosis and Laboratory Guidelines

Diagnosis is based on clinical illness. Detection of *C. tetani* toxin should not be considered among the list of laboratory methods for confirmation of tetanus since this assay is not available or in use.

## Reporting

Per Policy 2.2 Disease and Event notification to OCMOH and Disease and Event Reporting section

- Routine surveillance (RDSS) for all confirmed cases.

## Case Management

### Education

Case or relevant caregiver should be informed about:

- Signs and symptoms of disease, mode of transmission and the importance of immunization.
- Hazards of puncture wounds and closed injuries.
- Safer injection practices.

### Investigation

Determine injury history and vaccination status, and arrange for primary course or booster depending on vaccination history.

### Exclusion/Social Distancing

Not applicable.

### Treatment

Prophylaxis as part of wound management. Tetanus vaccine (and tetanus immunoglobulin, if necessary) for tetanus-prone wounds at the time of injury where more than ten years have elapsed since last dose of vaccine.

### Immunization

Routine immunization is recommended.

## Contact Management

### Education

Not applicable

### Investigation

Contacts of cases are not at risk as there is no person-to-person transmission.

### **Exclusion/Social Distancing**

Not applicable.

### **Prophylaxis**

Not applicable.

### **Outbreak Management**

Activate the local outbreak plan when an outbreak is declared.