

This is a condition caused by bacteria usually found in the soil.

What to look for

If you have a cut or wound and any of these things occur - call your doctor

- stiffness of the neck, jaw - lock jaw, and other muscles
- uncontrollable spasms of the jaw and neck muscles.
- painful, involuntary contraction of other muscles.

This bacteria can also live in animal manure, house dust and the human intestines. If you incur any injury tetanus spores can be implanted into the skin. Regardless of how small or insignificant the accident or injury is, tetanus spores can still enter the broken skin.

The bacteria survive in areas with no oxygen. The bacteria make a toxin which is dangerous. From the wound where the bacteria entered, the toxin travels via the blood to the spinal cord and the brain. If the toxin reaches the nervous system, it cannot be controlled by any treatments.

Some people may experience only pain and tingling at the wound site and some spasms in nearby muscles. Most people however, suffer stiff jaw and neck muscles, irritability, and difficulty swallowing.

Causes

Bacteria enter the body via wounds, create a deadly toxin which travels to the spinal column and the brain.

Traditional Treatment

If you suspect you may have tetanus - go immediately to a hospital.

Prevention

The best method of avoiding this disease is by being adequately immunised. Also if you are wounded, clean the wound but if you are worried about contracting tetanus, only use light dressing as the bacteria will die upon exposure to the oxygen in the air.

You do not automatically get tetanus just because you stood on a rusty nail for example. It depends on how deep the wound is and whether you have been immunised recently for the disease, also on how clean the wound is.

Always dress wounds properly - this means all cuts, abrasions and punctures. If the object which contributed to your wound came from the ground - dress the wound as best you can and see a doctor immediately. He or she will advise you further and possibly give you an updated tetanus shot if you haven't already been immunised in the last 5 years.

Make sure you have your whole family immunised against tetanus and keep records.

When to seek further professional advice

- you have a wound or have been bitten by a cat or dog and have not been properly immunised against tetanus.