

TETANUS: MESSAGES

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About the Message Library

People affected by disaster must have access to timely, appropriate and accurate information to help them keep themselves and their families safe and well. They should know their rights, entitlements and be able to give feedback. Responders have a duty to put in place appropriate, systematic and coordinated mechanisms to ensure this.

Our Message Library offers clear, concise and simple messages on a range of topics as templates for you to adapt and use in the context you are working in. These are intended to help you make a quick start on communicating with communities while you further develop mechanisms for on-going dialogue with diverse groups within each community.

For help contextualising and using the messages we recommend you do our e-learning course and read the following technical guidance.

E-learning

<https://kayaconnect.org/course/info.php?id=768>

Guidance

<https://www.cdacnetwork.org/tools-guidance/cdac-message-library-user-guidance>

What is it?

Tetanus is an infection that is particularly common and serious in newborn babies. It often occurs after mothers give birth in unhygienic conditions and is difficult to treat and very dangerous. All pregnant women and their newborns need to be protected against tetanus by being vaccinated.

How is tetanus transmitted?

Tetanus is a serious illness contracted through exposure to the spores of the bacterium, *Clostridium tetani*, which live in soil, saliva, dust, and manure. The bacteria can enter the body through deep cuts, wounds or burns affecting the nervous system. The infection leads to painful muscle contractions, particularly of the jaw and neck muscle, and is commonly known as [insert local common name e.g. "lockjaw"].

Tetanus bacteria or spores grow in dirty cuts. These bacteria can grow if the umbilical cord is cut with an unclean knife or if anything unclean touches the end of the cord. If a pregnant woman is not immunised against tetanus, and tetanus bacteria or spores enter her body, her life will also be at risk.

Signs and symptoms

Symptoms can include:

- jaw cramping or the inability to open the mouth
- muscle spasms often in the back, abdomen and extremities
- sudden painful muscle spasms often triggered by sudden noises
- trouble swallowing
- seizures
- headache
- fever and sweating
- changes in blood pressure or fast heart rate.

In neonatal tetanus, symptoms include muscle spasms, which are often preceded by the newborn's inability to suck or breastfeed, and excessive crying.

If you (or your child) have any of these symptoms, go to your nearest health facility immediately for advice and treatment.

Treatment

If you think you or your child may have tetanus, go to your nearest health worker immediately to receive treatment. If serious, you may need to be referred to hospital.

Advice on preventing tetanus in newborns

The best way to prevent your baby from catching tetanus is to get vaccinated yourself during pregnancy. This protects you and also your baby during their first few months of life. If you have never had the vaccine before, you will need to get vaccinated several times, at one-month intervals. Contact your nearest health facility or community health worker for more details.

Additionally, robust medical practices can also prevent tetanus disease including clean delivery and cord care during childbirth.

Tetanus vaccination requirements for children

Every child should receive 3 doses of the tetanus vaccine as a baby beginning as early as 6 weeks of age, with subsequent doses given with a minimum interval of 4 weeks between doses, followed by 3 booster doses. The 3 booster doses should preferably be given during the second year of life (12–23 months), at 4–7 years of age, and at 9–15 years of age. Ideally, there should be at least 4 years between booster doses.

Tetanus vaccination requirements for expectant mothers

Tetanus vaccination prevents mothers and newborn babies from getting infected with tetanus. The first dose should be as soon as a woman knows she is pregnant. Contact your nearest health centre or community health worker to arrange this.

Where to get vaccinated

You and/or your child can get the tetanus vaccine at [insert info here]. Opening hours are from [insert time] to [insert time].

Vaccine safety

The tetanus vaccine is safe to give during a pregnancy: Contact your nearest health centre or community health worker to arrange this.

Possible side effects of the vaccine

After the tetanus vaccination, there may be a little redness and swelling around where the injection was. You may also feel slightly unwell. This is nothing to worry about and should pass.

REFERENCES

For more information on this topic, we recommend you read the following references.

Centers for Disease Control (2020). **Tetanus Vaccination.**
www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd/tetanus/index.html

World Health Organization (2021). **Tetanus.**
www.who.int/health-topics/tetanus#tab=tab_1

World Health Organization (2018). **Tetanus: factsheet.**
<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/tetanus>

World Health Organization (2021). **Immunization coverage**
<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/immunization-coverage>

HELP US KEEP THE LIBRARY UP TO DATE

If you would like to contribute to topic reviews, have found a message that needs greater clarity, or wish to create a new topic, please contact us at info@cdacnetwork.org.