

Tetanus

Agent: Toxin secreted by the bacteria *Clostridium tetani*

Mode of Transmission: The bacteria enter the body through a break in the skin, usually when a wound is infected by contaminated soil, dust, or animal or human feces. Person-to-person transmission does not occur.

Signs/Symptoms: A descending pattern of painful muscle contractions, particularly of the neck muscles, difficulty swallowing, and abdominal rigidity.

Prevention: Tetanus vaccine is available as part of the diphtheria/tetanus/pertussis (DTaP) vaccine for children and as a new combination tetanus/diphtheria/pertussis (Tdap) vaccine for adolescents and adults. One dose of Tdap should be given at 11 to 12 years of age with booster doses of tetanus/diphtheria (Td) every ten years.

Other Important Information: The case-fatality rate of tetanus ranges from 10% to 80% and depends on age, quality of and access to care, length of incubation and recognition of symptoms as indicative of tetanus. Attempts at laboratory confirmation may not be helpful because the organism is rarely recovered from the site of infection, and there is usually no detectable antibody response.

No cases of tetanus were reported in Virginia in 2010. Single cases were reported in 2004 and 2005. The 5-year average for reported cases of tetanus is 0.2 cases per year.