Tetanus Immune Globulin
Information Sheet

What is tetanus?
Tetanus is a serious disease caused by bacteria that produce a toxin (a chemical or poison that harms the body) which affects the brain and nervous system. It can cause severe muscle spasms in the jaw, face and neck, which can spread to other parts of the body. Tetanus bacteria and their spores are present throughout the world in the soil and in animal and human intestines.

How is tetanus spread?
Tetanus is not contagious. Tetanus is not transmitted from person to person. Tetanus bacteria or spores can enter the body through any wound to the skin, including a cut, scrape, scratch, animal bite, puncture or deep wound, insect bite, burn, crush injury or injection drug site.

What are the symptoms of tetanus?
The symptoms of tetanus are most commonly muscle stiffness or muscle spasm in the jaw (lockjaw) and face followed by stiffness of the neck and difficulty in swallowing. These spasms can quickly spread to muscles of the abdomen, upper arms and thighs. In some cases, the muscle spasms can be strong enough to cause fractures of the spine. Tetanus can be fatal.

How can tetanus be prevented?
The best way to prevent tetanus is to be immunized against this disease. Tetanus vaccine is given to children as part of their routine immunizations starting at 2 months of age with booster doses of tetanus containing vaccine given to preschool children and children in grade 9. Tetanus boosters are recommended for adults every 10 years.

What is tetanus immune globulin?
Tetanus Immune Globulin (TIG) is a sterilized blood product prepared from human blood plasma, which contains concentrated amounts tetanus antibodies. Antibodies are substances created in the blood to fight infections. TIG is given to a person that may have been exposed to tetanus bacteria to prevent the disease. The person will have immediate protection, but this lasts only a short time. Tetanus vaccine should also be given with the TIG. When a person receives a vaccine, the body will develop its own antibodies - a process which takes time. Several doses of vaccine are required for long-lasting protection.

Is tetanus immune globulin safe?
TIG is among the safest blood products available. Canadian Blood Services carefully screens donors and tests all blood plasma collected. In addition, the product is treated with heat and chemical processes to eliminate any other germs in case they may have been missed during the screening process. TIG does not contain any preservative.

Who should get tetanus immune globulin?
Tetanus immune globulin is recommended for people who have a puncture or deep wound, a wound contaminated with dirt, soil or feces, or a burn and who:
• have an unknown or uncertain history of tetanus immunization
• have had less than 3 doses of a tetanus containing vaccine
• are immunocompromised regardless of the time since their last dose of tetanus containing vaccine
Who should not have tetanus immune globulin?
Because tetanus can be fatal, people should receive TIG if it is recommended. Talk to your public health nurse or health care provider if you have:

- a history of severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to an immune globulin or any of its components
- had an unusually severe reaction to an immune globulin in the past
- any disorder that would contraindicate intramuscular injection (i.e., severe thrombocytopenia)
- an isolated IgA deficiency

People who have received a live vaccine (e.g., measles, mumps, rubella or varicella containing vaccine) in the 14 days before receiving TIG may need to have the vaccines repeated. Those who receive TIG should postpone receiving live vaccines for at least 3 months after receiving TIG. TIG may interfere with the development of antibodies to these specific live vaccines. Talk to your public health nurse or health care provider for more information.

What are the possible side effects to tetanus immune globulin?
Most people have no reactions to the product. Reactions that do occur are typically mild.

Possible reactions include:

- pain, tenderness and muscle stiffness at the injection site
- hives, swelling and redness
- fever

As with any injection, unexpected or unusual side effects can occur. This includes severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis).

What should you do if you have a reaction to tetanus immune globulin?

- Apply a cool moist cloth where the needle was given to reduce the pain and swelling
- Take a medication such as acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol®) to reduce the pain.
  - Aspirin® (ASA) is not recommended for individuals under 19 years of age
- Report any unusual reactions to Health Link Alberta

For health advice and information 24 hours a day, seven days a week, call Health Link Alberta at:

- 403-943-5465 in Calgary
- 780-408-5465 in Edmonton
- Toll free 1-866-408-5465 elsewhere in Alberta


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