

Communicable Diseases

Tetanus, Diphtheria Vaccine (Td)

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Vaccines (also called “needles” or “baby shots”) are the best way to protect against some very serious infections. The Canadian Paediatric Society and the National Advisory Committee on Immunization strongly recommend routine immunization.

Td is a two-in-one needle. It protects against diphtheria, and tetanus.

What is Tetanus?

Tetanus (or lockjaw) is a serious disease that can happen if dirt with the tetanus germ gets into a cut in the skin. Tetanus germs are found everywhere, usually in soil, dust, and manure. If you have a cut infected with the tetanus germ, you may get tetanus. It does not spread from person to person. The bacteria in the wound make a poison. The poison causes cramping of the muscles in the neck, arms, leg, stomach, and painful convulsions that can be severe enough to break bones. Even with early treatment, tetanus kills two out of every 10 people who get it.

What is Diphtheria?

Diphtheria is a serious disease of the nose, throat, and skin. It causes sore throat, fever and chills. It can also cause breathing problems, heart failure, and nerve damage. Diphtheria kills one out of every 10 people who get the disease. It is passed to others through coughing and sneezing.

Who should receive the Td vaccine?

Td can be given to anyone seven years of age or older who requires vaccination for tetanus and diphtheria and who do not need or want polio or pertussis vaccination. This vaccine may be given with other vaccines at separate sites using separate needles. If you or your child misses a needle, you should get the next needle as soon as possible. Adults should get Td vaccine boosters every 10 years for continued protection. Your family health care provider will tell you when to return for future needles.

How well does Td vaccine protect my child and me?

When Td vaccine is given in the recommended number of doses, it protects:

- about 95 per cent of people against tetanus
- over 85 per cent of people against diphtheria

Even if you or your child still caught these diseases, the symptoms would be much less severe because of the vaccine.

Is the Td vaccine safe?

Yes. Serious side effects are rare. Mild pain, swelling, and redness for a few days are common at the spot where the needle was given. Some people get a fever, lose their appetite, or are drowsy for a day or two after the vaccination. Your family health care provider may suggest you give your child a medicine called acetaminophen to prevent pain and fever.

Call your family health care provider or local hospital if you or your child has any of the following within three days of getting the needle:

- high fever (over 40°C or 104°F)
- crying for more than three hours
- convulsions or seizures
- very pale color and serious drowsiness
- hives (itchy rash)
- swelling of the face or mouth
- trouble breathing
- other serious problems

Who should not get the Td vaccine?

Your family health care provider may decide not to give you or your child's needle or may give a different vaccine if you or your child has:

- a high fever or serious infection worse than a cold
- had an allergic reaction to this vaccine to a previous dose of any vaccine containing tetanus or diphtheria
- a severe allergy to any parts of the vaccine including: aluminum phosphate, formaldehyde, 2-phexonyethanol
- religious or philosophical objections to any part of the vaccine
- children less than seven years old
- anyone who developed Guillain-Barre Syndrome within eight weeks of a previous dose of a vaccine containing tetanus
- anyone who has had a Tetanus shot in the past five years

Td vaccine is not routinely given to pregnant women. If you are pregnant, discuss the risk and benefits with your health care provider.

Whom should I talk to if I have any more questions about the Td vaccine?

Talk to your family health care provider or the Huron County Health Unit (519-482-3416) for more information.

Your Record of Protection

After your child receives any immunization, make sure the doctor updates the yellow personal Immunization Record card. Keep it in a safe place!