

## Tetanus, Diphtheria, and Pertussis: Diseases and Vaccines

Also available in French:  
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*Tétanos, diphtérie et coqueluche : renseignements sur les  
maladies et les vaccins*



[www.nshealth.ca](http://www.nshealth.ca)

# Tetanus, Diphtheria, and Pertussis

Tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis are serious (very bad) diseases. They can be prevented by getting a vaccine. When pregnant people get the Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria, acellular pertussis) vaccine, it also protects their babies from pertussis.

## What is tetanus?

- Tetanus is a disease caused by cuts or wounds that get infected with tetanus bacteria. Tetanus bacteria is often found in dirt.
- Tetanus is also called lockjaw.
- Tetanus bacteria makes a poison that causes your muscles to spasm (contract or convulse on their own).
- Tetanus can cause death.

## What is diphtheria?

- Diphtheria is a disease caused by bacteria. It is very contagious (spreads very easily from person to person).
- 1 in 10 people who get diphtheria will die of the disease.
- The symptoms of diphtheria may include:
  - › Nose and throat infection that may affect your breathing
  - › Skin infection
  - › Heart failure
  - › Paralysis (not being able to move)

## What is pertussis?

- Pertussis is an infection caused by bacteria. It is also called whooping cough.
- Pertussis affects babies under 1 year of age the most severely (very badly).
- Symptoms may last from 6 to 12 weeks. They include:
  - › Very bad coughing that may affect your breathing
  - › Pneumonia (lung infection)
  - › Seizures (sudden electrical brain activity that can change how you act, move, or feel for a short time)
- Pertussis can cause death.

## What is Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria, acellular pertussis) vaccine?

- The Tdap vaccine protects against all 3 diseases with 1 vaccine.
- Getting immunized with the Tdap vaccine is the best way to prevent tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis.

- The vaccine is injected into your muscle using a needle.

### Who should get the Tdap vaccine?

The Nova Scotia Immunization Schedule recommends that the Tdap vaccine be given to:

- Students in Grade 7 (as part of the School Immunization Program)
- Adults 18 years old and older who:
  - › have **not** had a dose of acellular pertussis vaccine after high school.
  - › need a tetanus vaccine and have **not** yet had a pertussis-containing vaccine in adulthood (1 dose).
- Pregnant people. You should get the Tdap vaccine during each pregnancy. This protects your baby from pertussis. Babies have the highest risk of severe, life-threatening complications from pertussis.

**Check with your primary health care provider (family doctor or nurse practitioner) before getting this vaccine if:**

- › your immune system is weak because of a medical condition, or because of medications you are taking.
- › you have a bleeding disorder or are taking blood-thinning medications.

### Who should NOT get the Tdap vaccine?

You should **not** get the Tdap vaccine if:

- you are sick or have a fever (temperature above 38 °C or 100.4 °F).
- you had a serious allergic reaction to a previous dose, or to any part of the Tdap vaccine, like:
  - › swelling in your face or lips.
  - › trouble breathing.
  - › a drop in your blood pressure.

If you or your child had a serious allergic reaction to a part of the vaccine in the past, talk to your health care provider about getting the Tdap vaccine from a specialist in a clinic that can control severe reactions.

## **After you get the Tdap vaccine**

- Stay in the clinic for at least 15 minutes after you get the vaccine. This is in case you have any reactions. There is a small chance that you may have a more serious reaction.

## **Possible side effects**

- Common side effects include:
  - › redness, swelling, and pain where the needle goes in.
- Less common side effects include:
  - › Fever
  - › Chills
  - › Diarrhea (loose, watery poop)
  - › Nausea (feeling sick to your stomach)
  - › Mild headache
  - › Body aches
  - › Having less energy
  - › Sore or swollen joints

You can take acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (Advil®) if you or your child has a fever. Follow the instructions on the container. You should **not** take these medications if you have certain medical conditions. Talk to your health care provider about your medical history before using either of these medications.

## **Possible risks**

- Some people faint (pass out) before, during, or after immunization. If you usually faint after immunizations, tell your health care provider before being immunized.
- Fainting can cause injuries from falling.
- Sitting or lying down for 15 minutes after you get the vaccine can help prevent fainting.

## **Tell your health care provider right away if:**

- › you feel dizzy.
- › your vision changes.
- › you have ringing in your ears.

**Call your health care provider if you or your child has:**

- › A fever (temperature above 38 °C or 100.4 °F) for more than 24 hours, or that does not get better after taking acetaminophen or ibuprofen.
- › Seizures.
- › Other symptoms.

**Call 911 right away if you think the person is having a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis).**

**Severe allergic reactions**

- Severe allergic reactions to Tdap vaccine are rare. If needed, your health care provider can give you epinephrine and call 911.
- Symptoms of anaphylaxis include:
  - › Itchy skin or hives
  - › Sneezing
  - › Stuffy nose
  - › Watery eyes
  - › Coughing or wheezing
  - › Swelling of the face and throat
  - › Flushed skin
  - › Trouble breathing
  - › Cramps
  - › Vomiting (throwing up)
  - › A fast heartbeat
  - › Dizziness or weakness
- Symptoms usually start a few minutes after immunization, but may start a few hours after immunization.

**Call 911 right away if you think the person is having anaphylaxis.**

## **Questions?**

- If you have any questions about tetanus, diphtheria, or pertussis, or the Tdap vaccine, call Public Health or your health care provider.
- Find the phone number of the Public Health office closest to you:
  - › [www.nshealth.ca/public-health-offices](http://www.nshealth.ca/public-health-offices)

## **Immunization information**

- For more information about immunization and its benefits and risks, visit:

### **Immunize Canada**

- › [www.immunize.ca/diseases-vaccines](http://www.immunize.ca/diseases-vaccines)
- › [www.immunize.ca/parents](http://www.immunize.ca/parents)

### **Public Health Agency of Canada**

- › [www.phac-aspc.gc.ca](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca)

### **Canadian Paediatric Society**

- › [www.cps.ca](http://www.cps.ca)

### **Immunize.org**

- › [www.immunize.org/handouts/discussing-vaccines-parents.asp](http://www.immunize.org/handouts/discussing-vaccines-parents.asp)

### **811**

- › <https://811.novascotia.ca>

