

Tetanus and diphtheria (Td) vaccine

Immunization has saved more lives in Canada in the last 50 years than any other health measure.

What is the Td vaccine?

The Td vaccine protects against 2 diseases:

- Tetanus
- Diphtheria

The vaccine is approved by Health Canada and is provided free. Call your health care provider to make an appointment.

In early childhood, immunization for tetanus and diphtheria is combined with other vaccines such as pertussis (whooping cough) and polio. These are given as a series of doses. Most children receive these as infants and toddlers. They get a booster dose before they start kindergarten and again in grade 9.

For more information about these immunizations, see:

- [HealthLinkBC File #15a Tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis, polio \(Tdap-IPV\) vaccine](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #15b Diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, polio, *haemophilus influenzae* type b \(DTaP-IPV-Hib\) vaccine](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #18c Tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis \(Tdap\) vaccine](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #105 Diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, hepatitis b, polio, and *haemophilus influenzae* type b \(DTaP-HB-IPV-Hib\) vaccine](#)

Who should get the Td vaccine?

The vaccine can be given to people who are at least 7 years. It is typically given to adults aged 18 years and older. Adults who were immunized against tetanus and diphtheria when they were younger should get a booster dose of the Td vaccine every 10 years. This booster strengthens or boosts the

immune system to give better protection against these diseases.

Adults who have not been immunized or do not have a record of prior immunization should also get the vaccine. The vaccine may also be given to people with serious cuts or deep wounds if their last tetanus vaccine was given more than 5 years ago.

If you have a serious cut or wound, including punctures, bites, burns or scrapes, it is recommended that you see your health care provider immediately for treatment. This is especially important if the wound is dirty.

It is important to keep a record of all immunizations received.

What are the benefits of Td vaccine?

The Td vaccine is the best way to protect against tetanus and diphtheria, which are serious and sometimes fatal diseases.

When you get immunized, you also protect others.

What are possible reactions after the vaccine?

Vaccines are very safe. It is much safer to get the vaccine than to get tetanus or diphtheria.

Common reactions to the vaccine may include soreness, redness and swelling where the vaccine was given. Fever, headache and muscle soreness may also occur.

Acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (e.g. Advil®) can be given for fever or soreness. ASA (e.g. Aspirin®) should not be given to anyone under 18 years of age due to the risk of Reye syndrome.

For more information on Reye Syndrome, see [HealthLinkBC File #84 Reye syndrome](#).

It is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting any vaccine because there is an extremely rare possibility, less than 1 in a million, of a life-threatening allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. This may include hives, difficulty breathing, or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips. If this reaction occurs, your health care provider is prepared to treat it. Emergency treatment includes administration of epinephrine (adrenaline) and transfer by ambulance to the nearest emergency department. If symptoms develop after you leave the clinic, call **9-1-1** or the local emergency number.

It is important to always report serious or unexpected reactions to your health care provider.

Who should not get the Td vaccine?

Speak with a health care provider if you or your child has had a life-threatening reaction to a previous dose of tetanus or diphtheria vaccine, or any part of the vaccine.

People who developed Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS) within 8 weeks of getting a tetanus vaccine, without another cause being identified, should not get the Td vaccine. GBS is a rare condition that can result in weakness and paralysis of the body's muscles. It most commonly occurs after infections, but in rare cases can occur after some vaccines.

There is no need to delay getting immunized because of a cold or other mild illness. However, if you have concerns, speak with your health care provider.

What are tetanus and diphtheria?

Tetanus, also known as lockjaw, is caused by bacteria mostly found in soil. When the bacteria enter the skin through a cut or scrape, they produce a poison that can cause painful tightening of muscles all over the body. It is very serious if the breathing muscles are affected. Up to 1 in 5 people who get tetanus may die.

Diphtheria is a serious infection of the nose and throat caused by diphtheria bacteria. The bacteria are spread through the air by people sneezing or coughing or by direct skin-to-skin contact. The disease can result in very severe breathing problems. It can also cause heart failure and paralysis. About 1 in 10 people who get diphtheria may die.

These diseases are now rare in B.C. because of routine childhood immunization programs.

Mature minor consent

It is recommended that parents or guardians and their children discuss consent for immunization. Children under the age of 19, who are able to understand the benefits and possible reactions for each vaccine and the risk of not getting immunized, can legally consent to or refuse immunizations. For more information on mature minor consent see [HealthLinkBC File #119 The Infants Act, Mature Minor Consent and Immunization](#).

For more information

For more information on immunizations, visit ImmunizeBC at <https://immunizebc.ca/>.



ImmunizeBC



BC Centre for Disease Control
Provincial Health Services Authority

For more HealthLinkBC File topics, visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca/more/resources/healthlink-bc-files or your local public health unit. For non-emergency health information and advice in B.C. visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca or call **8-1-1** (toll-free). For deaf and hearing-impaired assistance, call **7-1-1**. Translation services are available in more than 130 languages on request.