



# Tetanus-Diphtheria Vaccine

## *What You Need to Know*

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*Deployment Medication Information Sheets (DMIS) are provided by the U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine (USACHPPM). Written for soldiers and their families, they provide basic information on deployment medications that are intended as guidance only; consult your health care provider for more information.*

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### **What are tetanus and diphtheria?**

- **Tetanus** (lockjaw) is caused by a bacterium that enters the body through a cut or wound and can be fatal. It causes serious, painful spasms of all muscles and can lead to “locking” of the jaw so you can’t open your mouth or swallow.
- **Diphtheria** spreads when bacteria pass from an infected person to the nose or throat of others. It causes a thick coating in the nose, throat, or airway and can lead to breathing problems, heart failure, paralysis, and death.

### **Who should get the vaccine and how is it given?**



- The vaccine provides active immunity against both tetanus and diphtheria. Since tetanus spores are present everywhere, you should maintain tetanus immunity with booster shots throughout your life. Tetanus immunity is especially important for military personnel, farm and utility workers, and everyone whose occupation makes them vulnerable to minor lacerations and abrasions.
- Your health care provider will give you the vaccine in three injections. You will be given the first two doses at an interval of 4 to 8 weeks, followed by a third dose 6 to 12 months later. Basic immunization is not complete until the third dose is given. Thereafter, a booster dose is given every 10 years throughout life.

### **What does the military require?**

The vaccine is required for military recruits lacking the primary immunization series. Boosters are required for all active duty forces.

### **Are there any side effects?**

- You may experience irritation, redness, swelling, warmth, itching, bruising, pain, and a hard lump at the injection site which lasts a few days up to a week.
- Other side effects include low-grade fever, chills, headache, muscle or joint aches, general body discomfort, flushing, and itching. If these symptoms continue or become bothersome, call your health care provider.
- Talk to your health care provider if you have tingling of the hands or feet, rapid heart rate, high fever, trouble swallowing, or a skin rash.

## Is there any reason I shouldn't get the vaccine?

- Tell your health care provider of any illnesses, infections, reactions to a previous vaccination, or allergies.
- If you have an infection, your health care provider may choose to delay the vaccination until you are better.
- You should not get the vaccine if you are receiving immunosuppressive agents.
- Tell your health care provider if you're taking any over-the-counter or prescription medicine, especially steroids or prednisone.

## What if I'm pregnant or breast-feeding?

- The vaccine should be given during pregnancy only when clearly needed. Talk to your health care provider about the risks and benefits.
- It is not known if the vaccine appears in breast milk. Consult your health care provider before breast-feeding.

## What should I do if I miss a dose?

If you miss a dose for any reason, get the missed dose as soon as possible and then continue the injection schedule. Do NOT re-start the vaccination series.

### **You can avoid getting tetanus and diphtheria!**

- Get each vaccination as scheduled.

**Be sure the vaccination is recorded in your medical record.**

## Where can I get more information?

- Health care provider at your military treatment facility.
- Military Immunizations web page: <http://www.tricare.osd.mil/immunization/vaccines.html>
- CDC Specific Disease web site: [www.cdc.gov/health/diseases.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/health/diseases.htm)
- CDC Vaccine Information web site: [www.cdc.gov/nip/publications/VIS/default.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nip/publications/VIS/default.htm)

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