

# Check List: Managing Patients Suspected of Having Tetanus

The purpose of this checklist is to provide clinicians step-by-step guidance for evaluating patients suspected to have tetanus to reduce the spread and facilitate Public Health investigations.

For questions, please call the Epidemiology Unit in the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health Vaccine Preventable Disease Control Program (VPDC) at (213) 351-7800  
 Monday to Friday 8:30am – 5:00pm  
 After business hours/weekends - (213) 974-1234, option 8 - Administrative Officer on Duty (AOD)

## Step 1. Clinically suspect tetanus and assess patient risk

- Determine [immunization and risk status](#) of the patient. Higher risk individuals include:
  - Persons who are under vaccinated or never received tetanus vaccine
  - Older adults
  - Persons who inject drugs, persons with diabetes, and persons with chronic wounds
- Determine the [type of wound](#) present:
  - Dirty or major wounds (especially those with devitalized tissue), such as penetrating or puncture wounds, burns, crush injuries, or gangrenous wounds, pose an increased risk of tetanus

## Step 2. Treat symptoms and provide appropriate wound care

### Step 3. Collect specimen(s) for tetanus testing

- Use bacterial transport media and collect samples from wound site/umbilical stump

### Step 4. Administer post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) treatment for tetanus

- For all [suspected tetanus infections](#), a **single 500 IU dose** of tetanus immune globulin (TIG) is recommended as treatment.
- For [dirty or major wounds](#) (Table 1), a **single 250 IU dose** of TIG is recommended as prophylaxis

Table 1: [Guide to Tetanus Prophylaxis Routine Wound Management](#)

No. doses of adsorbed tetanus toxoid-containing vaccines	Clean and minor wound		All other wounds	
	DTaP, Tdap, or Td	TIG	DTaP, Tdap, or Td	TIG
Unknown or <3	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
≥3	No <sup>f</sup>	No	No <sup>**</sup>	No <sup>§</sup>

<sup>f</sup>Yes, if >10 years since the last tetanus toxoid-containing vaccine dose.

<sup>\*\*</sup>Yes, if ≥5 years since the last tetanus toxoid-containing vaccine dose.

<sup>§</sup>Persons with severe immunodeficiency or HIV infection, who have contaminated wounds, should also receive TIG, regardless of tetanus immunization history.

## Step 5. Report suspect patient to Public Health

- Inform the patient that Los Angeles County Public Health may be in contact to provide tetanus-related assistance.
- Please email or fax the following to the Department or Public Health at [vpdc@ph.lacounty.gov](mailto:vpdc@ph.lacounty.gov) or (213) 351-2782:
  - ✓ Patient Demographics
  - ✓ Detailed exposure history
  - ✓ Medical Records
  - ✓ Immunization Records (if available)
  - ✓ Any associated lab results

