

Tetanus

Tetanus is a Class B Disease and must be reported to the state within one business day.

Tetanus is an acute disease caused by a toxin produced by *Clostridium tetani*, the tetanus bacillus, a normal inhabitant of soil and of animal and human intestines. The spores of the bacterium are ubiquitous in the environment, especially where contamination by excreta is frequent. Occurrence is worldwide but is more frequent in densely populated, warm and humid climates with rich organic soil.

Wounds, recognized or unrecognized, are the sites at which this organism multiplies and produces toxin. Contaminated wounds, those with devitalized tissue and deep-puncture trauma, are at greatest risk. Also at increased risk are heroin users, especially those that inject the drug subcutaneously.

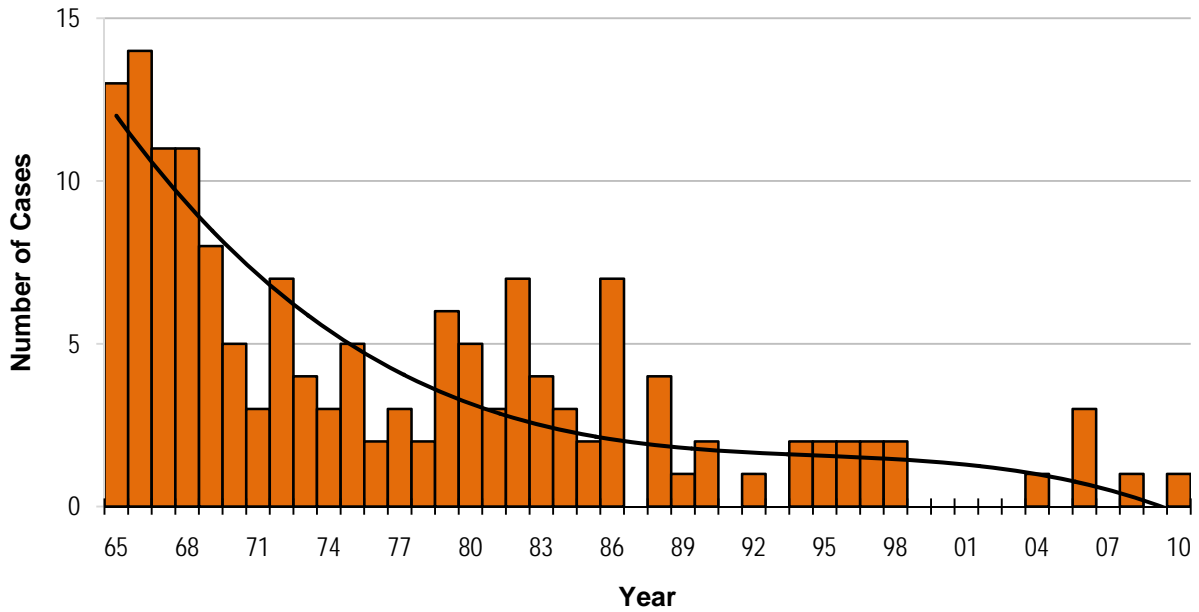
Widespread active immunization against tetanus has modified the epidemiology of the disease in the United States. Tetanus is not contagious from person-to-person. This disease is the only vaccine-preventable disease that is infectious but not contagious. Almost all cases of tetanus occur in persons either never vaccinated, or in persons that have received the initial series but have not received a booster vaccine within ten years of onset.

Twenty-five to one hundred cases of tetanus are reported annually in the United States. The case fatality rate is approximately 10%. From 1980 through 2000, most cases of tetanus were reported in persons over 40 years of age, however from 1996 to 2000, reports of tetanus in younger people rose (in part due to an increase in cases in injection drug users in California).

Cases, Rates, Trend

There are very few cases reported in Louisiana. The number decreased from ten to fifteen per year in the 1960's to one or two cases per year in recent times (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Number of tetanus cases – Louisiana, 1965-2010



In Louisiana from 1988 through 2010, most cases occurred in persons over 40 years of age (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Tetanus cases by age group - Louisiana, 1988-2010

