

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.

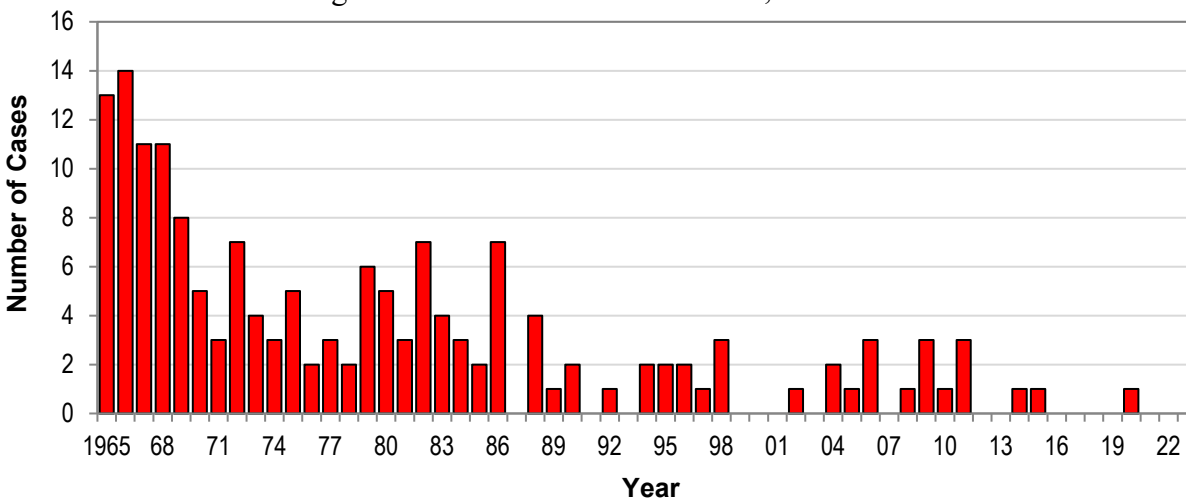
Widespread active immunization against tetanus has modified the epidemiology of the disease in the United States. Tetanus is not contagious from person-to-person. This disease is the only vaccine-preventable disease that is infectious but not contagious. Almost all cases of tetanus occur in persons either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

Sporadic cases of tetanus continue to occur in the United States. Since 2010, there have been less than 40 reported cases each year. During 2013 through 2022, the last years for which data have been compiled, a total of 267 tetanus cases were reported nationwide. Of those cases, the majority, 162 cases (61%) of cases were reported to be in adults between 20-64 years of age.

Cases, Rates, Trend

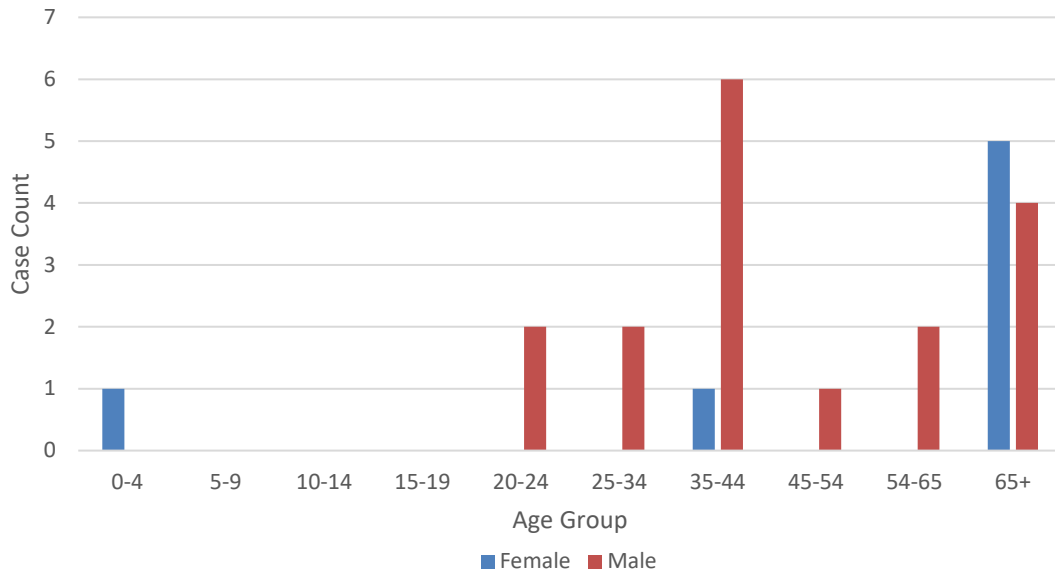
There are very few cases reported in Louisiana. The number decreased from ten to 15 per year in the 1960's to one or two cases per year in recent times (Figure 1A). The trend has continued to into 2023.

Figure 1: Tetanus cases – Louisiana, 1965-2023



Among the tetanus cases reported in Louisiana, adults over 20 are affected more frequently (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Tetanus Cases by Sex and Age - Louisiana, 1990-2023



Tetanus infections typically follow a seasonal pattern. Tropical climates see cases year round and cases may rise in wet seasons while temperate climates will see peaks in summer. This seasonality can be seen in Louisiana with peak infections occurring in July and October (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Tetanus Cases by Month, Louisiana 1990-2023

