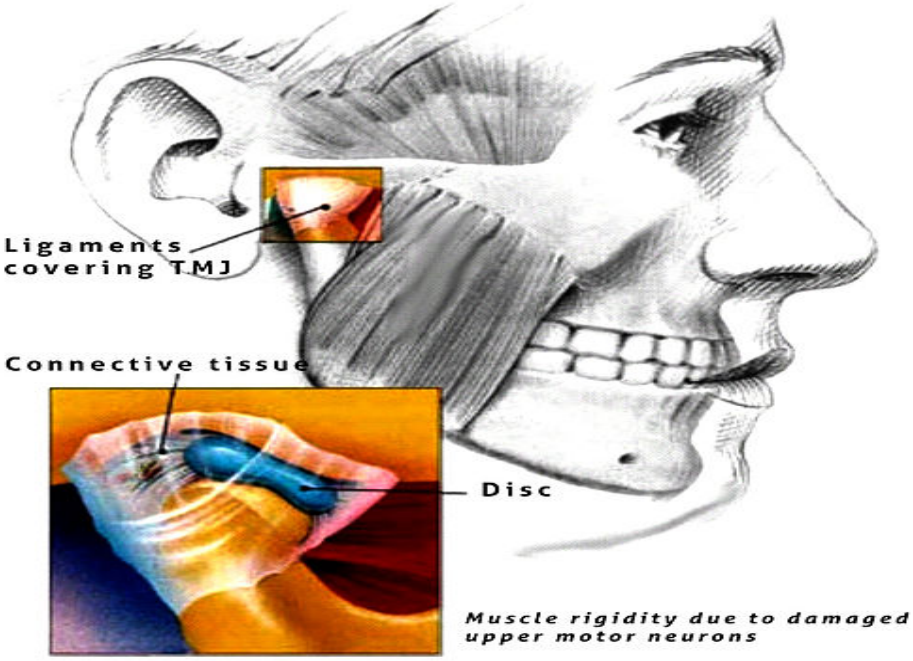
PLASTIC SURGERY

TETANUS

What is tetanus?

Tetanus, commonly known as 'lockjaw' is a rare but serious condition, caused when bacteria enters a wound.



Dirty wounds

Any patient who comes in with a dirty wound or burn but without symptoms of tetanus should have a thorough washout of their wounds and be considered for an injection of tetanus immunoglobulin. Tetanus immunoglobulin is a medication containing antibodies that kill the tetanus bacteria. It provides immediate, but short-term, protection from tetanus. However, if symptoms of tetanus have developed, ITU admission should be considered. Most people who develop symptoms of tetanus eventually recover, although it can take several weeks or months.

Vaccination

Due to tetanus vaccination being offered free of charge on the NHS, those who contract tetanus are either not vaccinated or did not complete the full course.

Clostridium tetani

The bacteria are found in soil, dust and animal faeces. When they enter a deep wound spores grow into bacteria that can produce a powerful toxin, tetanospasmin, which impairs the motor neurons. Tetanus bacteria can survive for a long time outside the body, and are commonly found in soil and the manure of animals such as horses and cows.

The bacteria can enter your body through:

- Gunshot wounds
- Compound fractures
- Burns
- Surgical wounds
- Injection drug use
- Animal or insect bites
- Infected foot ulcers
- Dental infections
- Infected umbilical stumps in newborns born of inadequately immunized mothers
- Puncture wounds — including from splinters, body piercings, tattoos, injection drugs

Management

Many of the traumatic injuries treated in the ED and by plastic surgery will require an assessment of tetanus status and consideration for immunoglobulins.

Guidelines for Tetanus

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tetanus-advice-for-health-professionals

This above document provides recommendations on the diagnosis and treatment of tetanus, including:

- the use of immunoglobulins for the treatment of clinical tetanus
- the management of tetanus prone wounds