



DIPHTHERIA

Diphtheria is a potentially serious bacterial infection of the nose and throat.

Who gets this disease?

Diphtheria occurs primarily among unimmunized or inadequately immunized people.

How is it spread?

The bacteria are spread by direct contact with discharge from the nose, throat, skin, eyes, or from sores of infected persons. Articles or food contaminated with discharge can also spread infection.

What are the symptoms?

Diphtheria causes a sore throat and swollen tonsils, with a grayish covering and swollen glands in the neck. It can lead to severe throat swelling that can block breathing. The bacteria also produce a toxin (a type of poisonous substance) that can cause severe and permanent damage to the nervous system and heart. Diphtheria is treated primarily with an antitoxin, along with antibiotics. Antibiotics are also given to the carriers of the diphtheria (e.g., people who test positive for diphtheria but who are not sick).

How can the spread of this disease be prevented?

The combination vaccine Diphtheria, Tetanus and acellular Pertussis (DTap), is required for childcare attendance. The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommends immunizing children against diphtheria, along with pertussis and tetanus, beginning as early as six weeks of age. The five dose series should be completed according to the licensed schedules and integrated into the routine childhood vaccination schedule.

The fifth DTap dose is given at age 4-6 years of age, however it is not required if the fourth dose was given on or after the fourth birthday.

Patients and carriers of diphtheria should receive appropriate treatment and not return to childcare until *two* (2) cultures from both the nose and throat (and from skin sores in cutaneous diphtheria), are negative for the bacteria. These cultures should be taken at least 24 hours apart and no sooner than 24 hours after finishing antibiotic treatment. Where culture is impractical, isolation may be ended after 14 days of appropriate treatment.

Who should be excluded?

Children and staff should be excluded until bacteriological examination proves them not to be carriers.

Reportable?

Yes, Diphtheria is reportable by New Hampshire law to the Division of Public Health Services, Communicable Disease Control Section at (603) 271-4496 or 800-852-3345 ext. 4496.