



DIPHTHERIA FACT SHEET

WHAT IS DIPHTHERIA?

Diphtheria is a bacterial infection. It is rare in the United States and in other developed countries.

HOW DO YOU GET DIPHTHERIA?

Diphtheria is spread from person to person, usually through respiratory droplets, like from coughing or sneezing. A person also can get diphtheria by coming in contact with a contaminated object.

SYMPTOMS

When the bacteria invade the respiratory system, they produce a toxin (poison) that can cause weakness, sore throat, fever, and swollen glands in the neck. Within 2 to 3 days, a thick coating can build up in the throat or nose, making it very hard to breathe and swallow. After exposure, it typically takes 5 to 10 days to show the first signs of being ill.

TREATMENT

Diphtheria can be treated with antitoxin and antibiotics. Diphtheria patients are usually kept in isolation, until they are no longer contagious. Discuss treatment options with your doctor.

PREVENTION

- The best way to prevent Diphtheria is to get vaccinated.
- Practice good hygiene to prevent the spread of respiratory illnesses by covering your mouth or nose when you cough or sneeze and washing your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.

DGHD EFFORTS

The Delaware General Health District (DGHD) offers the Diphtheria-containing vaccine. Please call (740)203-2040 to determine if you need the vaccine and to schedule an appointment. Reports of suspected and confirmed cases of disease are made to the DGHD. The DGHD investigates potential sources of illness, conducts surveillance for the spread of disease, and engages in community outreach and education.