



DIPHTHERIA (Respiratory)

What is DIPHTHERIA?

Diphtheria is a highly infectious and potentially life-threatening bacterial disease caused by *Corynebacterium diphtheriae*. Respiratory diphtheria involves the nose, throat and tonsils.

How is respiratory diphtheria spread?

Diphtheria is spread from person to person through close contact with discharges from an infected person's eyes, nose, throat or skin.

What are the symptoms of respiratory diphtheria?

Symptoms include sore throat, low-grade fever, muscle weakness, loss of appetite and enlarged lymph nodes located in the neck. A grayish colored membrane may form over the nose, throat and tonsils making it difficult to breathe or swallow.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms usually begin 2-5 days after exposure with a range of 1-10 days.

How long is a person able to spread diphtheria?

Untreated patients may be contagious for up to 4 weeks. With proper treatment, the contagious period can be limited to less than 4 days.

How is respiratory diphtheria treated?

Infection with respiratory diphtheria warrants immediate medical attention as any delay in treatment can result in death. A person with respiratory diphtheria should be hospitalized, isolated and treated with diphtheria antitoxin and antibiotics such as penicillin and erythromycin.

How is respiratory diphtheria prevented?

Diphtheria is vaccine preventable. Diphtheria vaccine for children is combined with tetanus and pertussis to form a triple vaccine known as DTaP. DTaP should be given at 2, 4, 6, and 15-18 months of age, and again between 4-6 years of age.