

Diphtheria Antitoxin (DA)

Get protected, get immunized.

- Antitoxins are passive immunization agents. This means they're used to treat some infections, but they don't give long-term protection like vaccines.
- For long-term protection, get a vaccine.

What is diphtheria antitoxin?

Diphtheria antitoxin is a treatment for diphtheria caused by *Corynebacterium diphtheriae* bacteria. This treatment is made from horse (equine) blood and stops diphtheria from getting worse. It is **not** a vaccine.

You can only get diphtheria antitoxin at a hospital by special order from a doctor.

What is diphtheria?

Diphtheria is a nose and throat infection caused by bacteria. It can cause trouble breathing or swallowing, heart failure, and paralysis (not being able to move all or part of your body). It can also cause skin infections.

Up to 1 out of 10 people who get diphtheria will die. Most deaths happen in very young children who are not immunized and older adults who are not immunized.

Who is most at risk?

People who travel to countries where there is risk of diphtheria and have not had all their diphtheria vaccines are at highest risk.

How does it spread?

Diphtheria is spread by coughing, sneezing, or having close contact with someone who has diphtheria.

Who can get diphtheria antitoxin?

Diphtheria antitoxin is a treatment given in the hospital if your doctor decides it is needed.

Anyone who needs diphtheria antitoxin can have it. But talk to your doctor if you have had:

- a serious allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to diphtheria antitoxin or any of its ingredients
- an allergic reaction to any equine products

How many doses of diphtheria antitoxin do I need?

The dose you need depends on how sick you are.

How well does diphtheria antitoxin work?

Diphtheria antitoxin works very well to stop diphtheria disease from getting worse. You will likely also need antibiotics.

Where can I get diphtheria antitoxin?

You can only get diphtheria antitoxin in a hospital. Your doctor needs to place a special order for it.

Are there side effects from diphtheria antitoxin?

There can be side effects from diphtheria antitoxin. Side effects may include:

- fever
- feeling itchy
- hives
- rash
- increased heart rate
- body aches or sore, swollen joints
- swollen and tender lymph nodes
- general swelling or redness
- redness in the face or chest (flushing)
- runny nose, sneezing
- cough, wheezing, or hoarseness
- feeling sick to your stomach (nausea), stomach pain, vomiting (throwing up), or loose stool (diarrhea)

At least 1 out of 100 people who got diphtheria antitoxin reported 1 or more of these side effects. In some cases, it is unknown if diphtheria antitoxin caused these side effects.

Allergic reactions can happen up to 3 weeks after having diphtheria antitoxin.

Some people may have a rare but serious allergic reaction (called anaphylaxis). If anaphylaxis happens, you will get medicine in the hospital to treat the symptoms.

See reverse for more information.

How can I manage side effects?

If you need diphtheria antitoxin, you will have to stay in the hospital. Your doctor will watch you closely and help you manage any side effects.

If you have an allergic reaction after you leave the hospital, contact your doctor or go to the nearest emergency department right away. Report the reaction to Health Link at 811.

What vaccines protect against diphtheria?

For long-term protection, you need to be immunized with a vaccine that protects against diphtheria:

- **DTaP-IPV-Hib-HB** protects against diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (whooping cough), polio, *Haemophilus influenzae* type B (Hib), and hepatitis B. As part of the routine immunization schedule, babies get this vaccine starting at age 2 months.
- **DTaP-IPV-Hib** protects against diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, polio, and Hib. As part of the routine immunization schedule, this vaccine is given to children who are age 18 months as a booster dose. Children may also get this vaccine if they are under age 2 years and are not getting the DTaP-IPV-Hib-HB vaccine and children age 2 to 6 years who have not had all their doses of diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, polio, and Hib vaccines.
- **Tdap-IPV** protects against tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis, and polio. As part of the routine immunization schedule, children get this vaccine as an extra (booster) dose if they are age 4 years and have already had their first 4 doses of a tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis, and polio vaccine. The Tdap-IPV vaccine used to be called dTap-IPV vaccine.
- **Tdap** protects against tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis. You can get it as a booster dose in Grade 9 and then every 10 years when you are an adult. This vaccine is also recommended every time you are pregnant. You may get this vaccine if you are not up to date with your tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis immunizations. The Tdap vaccine used to be called the dTap vaccine.

Can diphtheria antitoxin affect any vaccines I have had?

Diphtheria antitoxin can interfere with vaccines that protect for diphtheria. You need to wait 3 to 4 weeks after having diphtheria antitoxin before you can have a vaccine that protects against diphtheria.

For more information about immunization



Call Health Link at **811**



Scan the QR code or go to **ahs.ca/immunize**