

DIPHTHERIA

Below you will find information on diphtheria so that you can protect yourself and others. Diphtheria is a serious infectious disease that can still be deadly.

In the asylum centre you may come into contact with someone who has diphtheria. Or perhaps you came into contact with an infected person during your journey without realising it.

What is diphtheria?

Diphtheria is an infectious and potentially life-threatening disease. It is caused by diphtheria bacteria that affect the skin or mucous membranes in the nose and throat. The bacteria make a dangerous toxin that makes people sick, spreads throughout the body and can damage the organs. If a person has not been vaccinated against diphtheria and is not treated, the risk of severe disease is very high.

What are the symptoms of diphtheria?

Symptoms usually appear 2 to 5 days after contact with the diphtheria bacteria (but up to a maximum of 10 days). The symptoms depend on the location of the infection.

- The first symptoms are usually a sore throat, loss of appetite and mild fever.
- A coating forms in the nose, throat and/or airways that makes it difficult to swallow and breathe. There may be swelling of the lymph glands and the tissue on both sides of the throat. In the most severe cases the airways close up completely, causing people to suffocate.
- If the diphtheria bacteria gets into open sores on the skin, ulcers may develop. This usually occurs on the legs.
- The toxin produced by the diphtheria bacteria damages the organs, for example by paralysing the nerves. This damage is permanent.

How is diphtheria spread?

Diphtheria is spread through close contact with infected people, particularly through droplets when people sneeze, cough or speak. It can also be transmitted through direct contact with the fluids from the nose or mouth of an infected person, for example through kissing or sharing glasses or cutlery when eating. Infection is also possible through skin contact with infected sores or ulcers.

People without any symptoms can also spread diphtheria bacteria.

How can I protect myself against diphtheria?

A vaccine is available that offers very effective protection against diphtheria (see next page).

Do you know whether you (or your child) has received at least 3 doses of diphtheria vaccine and when? If you don't know or are unsure, it is important that you get vaccinated now. Please contact a healthcare professional for advice.

It is important that you inform the staff at the centre or the host at your accommodation immediately if you develop symptoms so that you can get timely treatment.

Important: Do you (or your child) feel unwell? Do you need medication, vaccinations or medical advice? Please don't hesitate to ask the staff at the centre or the host at your accommodation for help contacting a healthcare professional.

What should I do if I suspect I have diphtheria?

If you (or your child) has symptoms of diphtheria (see above), please contact the staff at the centre or the host of your accommodation straight away. Wear a mask and avoid contact with people outside of your family to protect others.

It is important that you are rapidly examined and receive treatment.

What should I do if I come into contact with someone who has diphtheria?

If you (or your child) has been in close contact with someone infected with diphtheria, you will be informed by the staff. To ensure that you (or your child) does not get sick and to protect others from catching the disease:

- You will be treated with antibiotics,
- You should let the staff know and wear a mask as soon as diphtheria symptoms appear, and
- You should avoid contact with others where possible.



Information on vaccination against diphtheria

Everyone should be vaccinated against diphtheria.

Ask a healthcare professional for advice if you have not yet been vaccinated against diphtheria or if you are unsure whether or not you are vaccinated.

The vaccination is administered at the same time as the vaccine against tetanus and polio (combined vaccine in a single injection).

Primary immunisation

If someone is unvaccinated or doesn't know whether they have been vaccinated, three doses of the vaccine are needed for complete protection. The second dose is given two months after the first and the third dose six months after the second. Please proactively let staff at the centre or your host know if you need another vaccine dose and don't yet have an appointment.

Booster vaccinations

To enhance and extend the protection provided by the vaccine, a booster is needed every 10–20 years depending on your age, and maybe sooner if you have been in contact with someone who is infected.

Potential side effects of vaccination

Side effects may occur with any vaccination. These mild side effects are **common** after vaccinations:

- Pain, redness or swelling at the injection site (on your arm where you got the injection).
- Fatigue
- Headache
- Fever

These reactions show that the body is building protection against the disease. The side effects are usually mild and only last a few days.

In **very rare** cases, people may experience a severe allergic reaction just after receiving the vaccination. For this reason, specially trained health workers are always nearby when vaccinations are administered.

