

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 (DA)?

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

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. In children under 5 years and adults older than 40 years, 2 to 4 out of 10 people who get diphtheria can die.

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 is infected.

Who should get diphtheria antitoxin?

You may get diphtheria antitoxin if your doctor decides you need treatment for diphtheria.

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.

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.

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.

Who should not get diphtheria antitoxin?

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

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. Babies can get this vaccine starting at age 2 months.
- **DTaP-IPV-Hib** protects against all of the same diseases as DTaP-IPV-Hib-HB except hepatitis B. Children born before March 1, 2018, who are under age 7 years, can get this vaccine as part of their primary series. Children can also get this vaccine as a booster dose when they are 18 months old.
- **dTap-IPV** protects against all of the same diseases as DTaP-IPV-Hib except Hib. It is most often used as a booster dose for children who are age 4 years.
- **dTap** protects against diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis. You can get it as a booster dose in Grade 9 and then every 10 years when you are an adult. You should also get this vaccine every time you are pregnant. You may get this vaccine if you are not up to date with your diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis immunizations.

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