Diphtheria Antitoxin (DA)

Immunization protects you from disease. Get protected, get immunized.

- Antitoxins are passive immunization agents. This means they are used to treat some infections, but they do not 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.

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
- body aches or sore joints
- swollen lymph nodes
- general swelling or redness
- dry cough, wheezing, or hoarseness
- feeling sick to your stomach (nausea) or vomiting (throwing up)

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. Children born on or after March 1, 2018, who are under age 2 years can get this vaccine.

- **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. Children who are age 4 years can get this vaccine as a booster dose.

- **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

- Call Health Link at 811
- Go to [ImmunizeAlberta.ca](http://ImmunizeAlberta.ca)
- Go to [MyHealth.Alberta.ca](http://MyHealth.Alberta.ca)

Facts about diphtheria

**What is diphtheria?**
Diphtheria is a nose and throat infection caused by bacteria. It can cause trouble breathing or swallowing, heart failure, and paralysis. It can also cause skin infections.

One out of 10 people who get diphtheria will 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 being in close contact with a person with diphtheria.