



Diphtheria

What are the symptoms?

Diphtheria is an acute bacterial viral infection of the tonsils, pharynx, larynx or nose, and occasionally of other mucous membranes or skin. The disease is caused by the toxins produced, causing tissue destruction, ulceration, heart and kidney failure. Humans are the only carriers of the bacteria.

How is Diphtheria spread?

Respiratory droplet infection is the most common route of transmission and occasionally with articles soiled by infected persons. Skin infection causing ulcers is common on the limbs of children in the tropics who go around barefoot. Conditions of crowding and poor hygiene increase the risk of infection.

In the western world, incidence of diphtheria has decreased significantly over the last 50+ years, perhaps due to the high uptake of the childhood vaccine. The disease however remains a problem in developing countries, such as Africa, South East Asia and South America. Cases have also been reported in Russia.

How can you avoid Diphtheria?

- Good personal hygiene and proper sanitation can help prevent Diphtheria.
- The most important method of prevention however is vaccination.

Vaccine recommendations:

Diphtheria vaccine is now combined with tetanus and polio as one injection.

Most people have had previous doses of diphtheria as 'baby injections' so a booster dose is usually all that is required when travelling to countries that still have the disease.