

Information for people who have diphtheria infection

20 May 2026

Diphtheria infection is treated with antibiotics. It is important to take your antibiotics every day until they are all finished.

If you get sicker or have any troubles with breathing, go straight to the clinic to have another check up.

Once you are better again get a booster vaccine for diphtheria to stop you from getting sick another time.

People you have spent time with or who stay in the same house may need to take antibiotics as well to stop them from getting sick with diphtheria.

How does diphtheria spread?

Diphtheria spreads when an infected person talks, coughs or sneezes. The infection may be breathed in by those nearby.

Diphtheria is also spread by touching diphtheria infected skin sores. The bacteria can also spread from hands, tissues, towels that are used by a person with the infection.



How can I stop infection spreading to my family and community?

Respiratory (throat) diphtheria

- Stay at home until all your antibiotics are finished and the clinic says you can. Try not to visit any other houses or go to the shop.
- Stay away from babies, Elders and other people who are sick.
- Try and stay in a different room at home to stop the infection spreading to other people.
- Do not sleep in the same bed as another person.
- If you have to be in rooms with other people, wear a mask. Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or cough/sneeze into the elbow or upper sleeve. Always clean hands after coughing or sneezing or after using a tissue.
- It is best to use your own towels, bed sheets, cups, knife and fork, and not share these with anyone else.
- Do not go to work, school, childcare, store or around the community until your antibiotics are finished and the clinic says you can.
- Keep windows and doors open to have good airflow in the house.

Cutaneous (skin) diphtheria

- Diphtheria in skin sores can be spread to your throat and make you very sick. Avoid touching the sore and clean your hands if you do.
- Keep your sores covered with a water-proof dressing until your antibiotics are finished to protect you and your family.
- Don't scratch or pick at your sore or let someone else touch your sores.
- If the dressing comes off, go to the clinic to get a new one. Put the used dressing in the rubbish bin in a bag, not left lying around.
- Do not go to work, school, childcare, store or around the community until you have had at least 3 full days of antibiotics.
- Make sure the sore is covered until it has healed.

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What if I miss a dose of antibiotics?

Take the missed dose as soon as you remember. If it is almost time for the next dose, skip the missed one and continue as normal – do not take a double dose. If you are unsure, ask the clinic.

How do I clean the house?

- Regular soap can be used for hand cleaning.
- Regular detergent and disinfectant can be used to wipe down surfaces at home.
- Clothes, bedding, and towels can all be washed using normal clothes detergent in a washing machine.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IMMEDIATELY if you develop any of these symptoms

- Difficulty breathing or swallowing
- A noisy sound when breathing in
- Fast heart rate, chest pain, or feeling very unwell
- Throat or neck swelling getting worse
- Any child who appears pale, floppy, or not responding normally