

Diphtheria

Agent: Toxin secreted by strains of the bacterium *Corynebacterium diphtheriae*

Mode of Transmission: Person-to-person transmission via respiratory droplets. Rarely, transmission may occur from contact with skin lesions or articles soiled with discharges from the lesions of infected persons.

Signs/Symptoms: Sore throat, anorexia, nasal discharge, and formation of a bluish-white, grayish-green, or black adherent membrane in the throat. More severe cases can include swelling of the neck and airway passages.

Prevention: Diphtheria vaccination beginning at two months of age. Antibody levels wane over time making booster doses necessary every 10 years, beginning at age 11-12 years.

Other Important Information: The overall case-fatality rate for diphtheria is 5%-10%, with higher death rates in young children and those over 40 years of age.

No cases of diphtheria were reported in Virginia during 2009. The last reported case occurred in 1989. Nationally, zero to five cases of diphtheria are reported each year.