

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 vaccine is available as part of the diphtheria/tetanus/pertussis (DTaP) vaccine for children and the combination tetanus/diphtheria/pertussis (Tdap) vaccine for adolescents and adults. One dose of Tdap should be given at 11 to 12 years of age with booster doses of tetanus/diphtheria (Td) every ten years thereafter.

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 2012. The last reported case occurred in 1989. Nationally, one case of diphtheria was reported in 2012; the most recent case before that occurred in 2003.