DIPHTHERIA

Diphtheria is a disease caused by the bacteria *Corynebacterium diphtheriae* that affects the tonsils, throat, nose or skin. These bacteria produce a toxin (poison) that causes severe illness.

Symptoms
Symptoms usually appear 2 to 5 days after infection, but can take up to 10 days. They include:
- Mild fever
- Runny nose (possibly with traces of blood or pus).
- Sore throat, hoarseness, loss of appetite
- Whitish-grey or bluish-white film on the inside of the throat
- Cough
- Swollen neck
- Complications of the disease may include breathing problems and spread of the infection to the heart or nerves. The bacteria may also infect the skin and form an open wound.

Transmission
- Diphtheria spreads by contact with fluids from an infected person's nose, throat, eyes or wounds. Rarely, people could get diphtheria from touching items contaminated by fluids from an infected person's nose, throat or wounds.
- It may be spread through coughing, sneezing, or even talking.
- Unless treated with antibiotics, people with diphtheria may be contagious for up to two weeks.

Treatment
- A treatment called antitoxin can be given, and sometimes the antibiotics penicillin and erythromycin can be used. If the patient is treated with appropriate antibiotics, this can quickly stop the spread of the bacteria.
- If diphtheria goes untreated, serious complications such as paralysis, heart failure and blood disorders may occur. Death occurs in approximately 5 to 10 percent of all cases.
- It is possible for someone to get diphtheria even if he or she has had it before.

Prevention
- The best prevention is getting vaccinated.
- Due to widespread immunization, diphtheria is rare in the United States. Travelers to other countries should make sure their shots are up to date before they leave.

Additional Information
Each of the Tetanus and Pertussis (DTaP for children or TDaP for adults) vaccines contain vaccine to diphtheria, there is no single vaccine for diphtheria available.

All information is general in nature and is not intended to be used as a substitute for appropriate professional advice.

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