Government of Western Australia
Department of Health

Diphtheria high-risk contact letter

You have been identified as a likely **high-risk contact** of a person with diphtheria. Although your risk of developing the infection is low, this letter explains what to look out for and what to do.

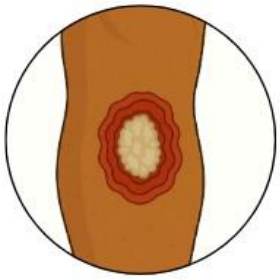
What is diphtheria?

Diphtheria is a serious infection caused by *Corynebacterium diphtheriae* bacteria. Some strains of the bacteria produce a toxin that can cause severe illness. Diphtheria can affect the throat or the skin.



Respiratory (throat) diphtheria

- Often starts like a cold with sore throat, fever and chills
- Can cause a thick greyish-white coating in the back of the nose or throat
- May cause swollen, painful glands in the neck
- Can worsen, making it difficult to breathe or swallow
- Can become life-threatening.



Cutaneous (skin) diphtheria

- Can start from a cut or wound that becomes infected
- Usually appears as sores or ulcers that are slow to heal, often on the legs
- May be covered with a grey, moist scab
- Is usually less severe but can still spread to others.

How is diphtheria spread?

Diphtheria spreads through close contact with an infected person:

- breathing in droplets from coughing or sneezing
- direct contact with saliva, respiratory secretions, or infected skin sores
- contact with contaminated items such as bandages, towels or utensils.

What do I need to do?

- Watch for symptoms for 7 days after your last contact with the infected person
- Take preventive antibiotics if they are given to you: _____
- Get a booster dose if your last diphtheria-containing vaccine was more than 12 months ago
- You may have swabs taken from your throat for testing, particularly if you are at increased risk of infection or attend a high-risk setting
- Avoid contact with babies, older people, and those who are sick or have weakened immune systems, until you have had at least 3 days of appropriate antibiotics or any swabs (if taken) are negative:
  - stay home from work, school or childcare if advised
  - if you are a healthcare worker and have been permitted to work, you must wear a mask
- If you have questions, contact your local clinic _____, local Public Health Unit during office hours _____ or call Healthdirect Australia on **1800 022 222**

What should I do if I have symptoms?

- **See a doctor as soon as possible** if you have a sore throat, or skin sores that are not healing.
- **Seek urgent medical care** if you have any difficulty breathing or swallowing.
- **Call ahead** before going to a clinic or hospital so they can take appropriate precautions, wear a mask if you have throat symptoms, cover any skin sores, and **take this letter with you**.
- Swabs of your throat or any skin sores may be taken for testing.