

Diphtheria: Questions and Answers

Information about the disease and vaccines

What causes diphtheria?

Diphtheria is caused by a bacterium, *Corynebacterium diphtheriae*. The actual disease is caused when the bacteria release a toxin, or poison, into the person's body.

How does diphtheria spread?

Diphtheria bacteria live in the mouth, throat, and nose of an infected person and can be passed to others by coughing or sneezing. Occasionally, transmission occurs from skin sores or through articles soiled with discharge from sores of infected persons.

Who should get this vaccine?

Infants should receive DTaP vaccine as part of their routine immunization. Adults should be given a routine booster dose of Td every 10 years. A single dose of Tdap is recommended for persons age 11 years and older in place of one of the Td doses, preferably the first one.

How safe is this vaccine?

Most people have no serious reactions from DTaP vaccine. The most common reactions are local reactions at the injection site, such as soreness, redness, and swelling. Other possible reactions may include fussiness, mild fever, loss of appetite, tiredness, and vomiting. The use of the more purified DTaP instead of DTP has decreased even these mild reactions. Tdap is a new vaccine but trials have shown it to be safe.

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Pertussis: Questions and Answers

Information about the disease and vaccines

What causes pertussis?

Pertussis is caused by a bacterium, *Bordetella pertussis*.

How does pertussis spread?

Pertussis is spread through the air by infectious droplets and is highly contagious.

How is this vaccine given?

The DTaP and Tdap vaccines are given as a shot in the muscle.

Who should get this vaccine?

All infants should receive DTaP vaccine as part of their routine immunization unless they have a medical reason not to. Persons 10 years and older can receive Tdap vaccine in place of a routine booster dose of adult Td vaccine.

How safe is this vaccine?

Most children have no serious reactions from this combined vaccine. The most common reactions are local reactions at the injection site, such as soreness, redness, and swelling, especially after the fourth or fifth dose. Other possible reactions may include fussiness, mild fever, loss of appetite, tiredness, and vomiting. The use of the more purified DTaP instead of the whole cell DTP has decreased these mild reactions substantially. Tdap is a new vaccine but trials have shown it to be safe.

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Tetanus: Questions and Answers

Information about the disease and vaccines

What causes tetanus?

Tetanus is caused by a toxin (poison) produced by a bacterium, *Clostridium tetani*. The *C. tetani* bacteria cannot grow in the presence of oxygen. They produce spores that are very difficult to kill as they are resistant to heat and many chemical agents.

How does tetanus spread?

C. tetani spores can be found in the soil and in the intestines and feces of many household and farm animals and humans. The bacteria usually enter the human body through a puncture (in the presence of anaerobic [low oxygen] conditions, the spores will germinate).

Tetanus is not spread from person to person.

How is this vaccine given?

The DTaP, DT, Td and Tdap preparations are all given as an injection in the muscle.

Who should get this vaccine?

Infants should receive DTaP vaccine (or DT-pediatric if they cannot receive the pertussis component) as part of their routine immunization. Adults should be given a routine booster dose of Td every 10 years. Adults without documentation of ever receiving the basic series of tetanus and diphtheria toxoids should first receive a primary series of three doses, properly spaced. A single dose of Tdap is recommended for persons age 11 years and older in place of one of the Td doses, preferably the first one.