

## News Release

### **For Immediate Release**

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### **What is Diphtheria?**

Diphtheria used to be the leading cause of childhood death in the United States before a vaccine was introduced in 1926. Between the years of 1921 to 1926 a large diphtheria epidemic swept through the country, including Nebraska. Now a vaccine preventable disease, diphtheria has become very rare in the U.S. but there continue to be outbreaks of this highly contagious disease in other parts of the world. Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD) recommends children and teens receive regularly scheduled immunizations to protect against diphtheria.

Diphtheria is a bacterial infection that releases a toxin (poison) inside the body. This toxin can make people very sick. Diphtheria is spread from person to person most commonly through respiratory droplets from things like coughing or sneezing. However, people can also get sick from touching a wound or open sore that is infected with diphtheria.

Symptoms of diphtheria may vary depending on which part of the body is infected. The bacteria usually affect the respiratory system which can cause sore throat, mild fever, and swollen neck glands. In 2-3 days after a person is infected, dead tissue that has been killed by the bacteria will make a gray coating in the throat that covers the tissues in the nose, throat, tonsils, and voice box, making it very hard to breathe and swallow. Diphtheria can also infect the skin, causing open sores or ulcers.

“Luckily diphtheria is very rarely seen in the U.S. nowadays, but it has recently been spreading more in other countries. It is important to continue to keep your family protected from this disease,” states Melissa Propp RN, Clinic Manager with Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department.

Current guidelines recommend that children get DTaP (Diphtheria, Tetanus and Pertussis also know as whooping cough) doses at age 2,4, and 6 months, 15-18 months, and at 4-6 years. Preteens get Tdap (Tetanus Diphtheria and Pertussis) at 11-12 years or the summer before starting 7<sup>th</sup> grade. Adults should get Td (tetanus, diphtheria) or Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis) every 10 years.

If you have further questions about these vaccines, call your health care provider or Melissa Propp, Clinic Manager. Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department serves Chase, Dundy, Frontier, Furnas, Hayes, Hitchcock, Keith, Perkins, and Red Willow counties. Follow us on Facebook and Instagram or view the website at [www.swhealth.ne.gov](http://www.swhealth.ne.gov). Call 308-345-4223, one number three locations - McCook, Imperial & Ogallala.

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