

# FACT SHEET

# DIPHTHERIA

**(Cutaneous - skin)**

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## **What is cutaneous (skin) diphtheria?**

Cutaneous diphtheria is a skin disease caused by the same bacterium *that causes respiratory diphtheria*.

## **Who gets skin diphtheria?**

Skin diphtheria is more common in warm climates. In the United States, skin diphtheria most often infects unvaccinated and homeless people.

## **How is skin diphtheria spread?**

Skin diphtheria spreads by contact with infected skin, and in crowded, dirty homes.

## **What are the symptoms?**

The sign of skin diphtheria is a non-healing, gray bump on the skin; but sometimes people can't tell the difference between it and other skin diseases.

## **Can others get this disease?**

Yes: The disease can spread for up to 2 weeks without medicine. With medicine, the disease stops spreading in 4 days. To be sure that others won't get sick, the skin infection must pass two lab tests after someone has finished proper medication.

## **How can I prevent others from getting sick?**

Cover the infected area with a bandage. Wash hands with soap and water after touching the infected area.

## **Can I get skin diphtheria again?**

Yes: unless you get vaccinated for diphtheria after infection.

## **If I'm sick with skin diphtheria, does my family need medicine also?**

Yes. All those who live in the same home and/or share food, drink, eating utensils, or saliva (e.g. kissing) need medicine to prevent illness, even if they received the vaccine.

## **What is the best way to prevent skin diphtheria?**

Vaccination! Most Americans are vaccinated for diphtheria in childhood. However, adults need to receive "booster" shots once every ten years. Ask your doctor whether your diphtheria vaccine is current.