

Diphtheria

Diphtheria is a Class A Disease. Any case must be reported immediately to the state by calling the phone number listed on the website.

Diphtheria is an acute bacterial disease usually affecting the tonsils, pharynx, larynx and nose caused by *Corynebacterium diphtheriae*. These organisms produce a toxin that is responsible for local tissue destruction and membrane formation.

In the 1980s and 1990s, diphtheria was nearly eliminated from industrialized countries. However, there is a continuous risk of the importation of toxigenic *C. diphtheriae* strains from endemic countries. For example, in Sweden in the mid 1980s, after twenty years of absence of diphtheria, an outbreak of eighty cases resulted from importation.

While only a handful of cases are reported each year in the U.S., serosurveys indicate that more than forty percent of adults lack protective levels of circulating antitoxin.

The last case of diphtheria in Louisiana was reported in 1972. (Figure 1)

Figure 1: Diphtheria cases - Louisiana, 1960-1979

