Since vaccination the number of Diphtheria cases has dropped from 23,269 in 2019 to 722 in 2021.

The disease

Caused by the bacterium Corynebacterium diphtheria, which mainly infects the throat and upper airways, and produces a toxin that affects other organs.

Symptoms

- The disease has an acute onset with sore throat, low-grade fever and swollen glands in the neck, and the toxin may, in severe cases, cause myocarditis or peripheral neuropathy.
- The toxin causes a membrane of dead tissue to accumulate over the throat and amygdals, making breathing and swallowing more difficult.
- Diphtheria is deadly in 5 - 10% of cases, with a higher mortality rate in young children.

Vaccines

- 6 doses are recommended (3 primary doses, followed by 3 booster doses).
- The primary series should begin at 6 weeks of age with subsequent doses given at a minimum interval of 4 weeks between doses.
- For booster doses there should be at least 4 years between doses: at two years, at 4 to 7 years, and at 9 to 15 years.

Transmission

- It is transmitted through direct physical contact or by droplets from coughing or sneezing of infected persons or through contaminated tissues or objects.

Calendar

- Diphtheria vaccination is normally administered with the DTP vaccine (Diphtheria, Tetanus, Pertussis).
- In addition, it is also administered in combination with tetanus, pertussis and Hib (quadrivalent); combined with tetanus, pertussis, hepatitis B and Hib (pentavalent); combined with tetanus, acellular pertussis, inactivated polio and Hib (pentavalent); combined with tetanus, acellular pertussis, inactivated polio and Hib (pentavalent).
- For adolescents and adults, diphtheria toxoid is often combined with tetanus toxoid in a lower concentration (Td vaccine).
- The combined diphtheria and tetanus toxoid vaccine (Td or TD) can be used in pregnancy.

For more information, visit: www.paho.org/immunization