

>>> IMMUNE PLATOON DISEASE DATABASE <<<

CASE FILE: TISSUE TROLLS • REAL NAME: DIPHTHERIA • KNOWN ALIASES: CORYNEBACTERIUM DIPHTHERIAE (FULL NAME OF THE BACTERIA THAT CAUSES DIPHTHERIA) • MICROBE TYPE: BACTERIUM



PROFILE

Diphtheria (pronounced dip-THEER-ee-uh) is a poisonous, toxic infector. When diphtheria strikes, its bacteria swarm and multiply in a victim's nose and throat. The bacteria release a poison that can cause a grayish membrane to form and coat the inside of the victim's throat. The membrane can cause breathing problems. Diphtheria can also strike other parts of the body, as its poison often leads to heart and nerve problems.

POWERS & ABILITIES

This attacker can kill. In the 1920s, before the vaccine, up to 15,000 people in the U.S. died from diphtheria every year. And, 100,000 to 200,000 people got sick from the disease. Now that we can shield ourselves with the vaccine, fewer than 5 people get diphtheria each year.

Diphtheria is a stubborn one. If a people with diphtheria don't get treated, they can spread the disease for up to 4 weeks.

PREFERRED METHOD OF ATTACK

Diphtheria is an "air and surface" attacker. The cough or sneeze of a person who has a throat full of diphtheria bacteria releases tiny droplets into the air. If someone else breathes in that wetness, diphtheria rides in ready to start another infection. Diphtheria also loves to lie in wait on some surfaces—like in the mucous on a used tissue or on silverware that's been in an infected person's mouth.

KNOWN WEAKNESSES

This villain is almost always foiled by the vaccine against it. Ninety-five percent of people with up-to-date diphtheria vaccine are protected. To make the vaccine, scientists use chemicals to "inactivate" diphtheria toxin. This dead toxin is called a "toxoid." The toxoid teaches your immune system how to fight diphtheria, but can't make you sick.

Diphtheria vaccine is always combined with vaccines for other diseases. Often, it's given as part of a powerful combination vaccine called "DTaP" because it protects against diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis.

PREFERRED VICTIMS

Children were once diphtheria's favorite victims. But, in the U.S., so many children are now immunized that diphtheria was forced to change its plan of attack. The disease now targets adults who have not had the vaccine recently. The vaccine's protection fades over time. So, people without "booster" dose of diphtheria vaccine are left without their best defense against diphtheria's assault.

PRECAUTIONS FOR THE PUBLIC

We have to be very careful with this poisonous attacker. The vaccine will keep a person from getting sick, but a vaccinated person can still spread the bacteria to others.

To keep this bad guy at bay, make sure your immunization is up to date. And, of course, wash hands with soap and cover up coughs and sneezes.

AREA OF OPERATIONS

In warmer climates, diphtheria launches most of its attacks in winter and spring, but attacks can happen anywhere.

CRIMINAL RECORD

Years ago, diphtheria was a common childhood disease. And, it was a common cause of death for children and adolescents. These days, this infector hits hardest among groups of people not protected by vaccine—regardless of whether they're children or adults.