



BC Centre for Disease Control
Provincial Health Services Authority

Immunization Programs and Vaccine Preventable Diseases Service
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Date: June 12, 2023

Administrative Circular: 2023:16

ATTN: Medical Health Officers and Branch Offices
Public Health Nursing Administrators and Assistant Administrators
Holders of Communicable Disease Control Manuals

Re: Update to Communicable Disease Control Manual, Chapter 1: Communicable Disease Control, Diphtheria

Chapter 1: Communicable Disease Control

Diphtheria

New Diphtheria CD guidelines have been developed for British Columbia. Key updates from the previous version (Health Canada – 1998) include:

- Additional information related to the description and management of cutaneous diphtheria.
- Diagnosis:
 - Per the recent Communicable Disease Policy Advisory Committee decision in March 2023, cutaneous site isolates will no longer be sent for toxin testing *unless* requested by the clinician who collected the sample based on the clinical context (e.g., travel to an endemic area and/or wound presentation). The vast majority of cutaneous site isolates with *C. diphtheriae* identified in BC are non-toxigenic strains and do not require routine investigation or prophylaxis of contacts.
 - Direct links to the [BCCDC Public Health Laboratory](#) and [eLab Handbook](#) have been added.
- Diphtheria antitoxin (DAT) dosages:
 - DAT dosages differ slightly from the previous Health Canada guidelines, as these are referenced to the 2023 US CDC guidelines and the product monograph for the DAT product supplied in BC.
 - A test for sensitivity to DAT should be carried out prior to each time DAT is administered. While some DAT product monographs do not recommend sensitivity testing prior to DAT administration, sensitivity testing is still the standard and recommended practice in all references reviewed, and continues to be recommended in BC for all patients prior to the administration of DAT. A link has been included to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Expanded Access Investigational New Drug \(IND\) Application Protocol: Use of Diphtheria Antitoxin \(DAT\) for Possible Diphtheria Cases](#) for a guide on sensitivity testing, and desensitization protocols, if necessary.

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- Contact and Carrier Management:
 - Clarity has been added throughout this section to indicate that follow-up of contacts is only recommended for cases or carriers with confirmation of a **toxigenic** strain of *Corynebacterium* species or those with a high index of suspicion for toxicity with toxin testing pending. For the latter, if the strain is shown to be non-toxicogenic, the investigation of contacts can be discontinued.

Please remove and destroy the previous version (Health Canada - July 1998) of the Communicable Disease Control Manual, Chapter 1 – Management of Specific Diseases – Diphtheria, and replace with the June 2023 version.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Stephanie Meier, Senior Practice Leader, BCCDC (telephone: 604-707-2577 / email: stephanie.meier@bccdc.ca).

Sincerely,



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