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**Diphtheria in Anchorage**

On June 29, 1975, a 59-year-old woman was seen in the outpatient clinic of an Anchorage hospital where she complained of a sore throat and dysphagia of two days duration. She was cultured and given 1.2 million units of Procaine Penicillin. The next day she returned to the clinic with a continuing dysphagia and sore throat. The physical examination of the lady revealed a classical gray-white diphtheritic membrane. Cultures of the throat at this time grew a toxigenic strain of *Corynebacterium diphtheriae*. The patient was treated with diphtheria antitoxin and high doses of penicillin. The patient required a tracheostomy and was hospitalized until her death on July 23, 1975. During the course of her treatment, the patient suffered both cardiac and neurologic symptoms which contributed to her death.

A contact of this case was cultured in the diphtheria outbreak in Seward but was negative. Currently, we have been unable to locate this person for further testing.

Alaska has experienced five cases of diphtheria in 1975. One case was reported in Juneau, Alaska, three cases, in Seward, Alaska and the most recent case in Anchorage. Two of the five cases reported have experienced severe disease. In one case, the patient was listed as critical for a period of time and had a tracheostomy performed. In the most recent case, the patient expired. In both instances, strong supportive therapy was given to the patients and diphtheria antitoxin was administered.

The possible relationship between the cases in Seward and Anchorage should alert physicians and nurses to maintain a high index of suspicion for diphtheria.

Immunization against diphtheria only protects against the diphtheria toxin. A person can be fully immunized and still carry the organisms or have a severe pharyngitis. The diphtheria toxoid is fairly effective in preventing the neurologic and cardiac complications of diphtheria.

A supply of diphtheria antitoxin is available from the State's regional laboratories in Juneau, Fairbanks and Anchorage. Request for assistance or vaccine can be made through the State Laboratories, local public health nurses, or the Director of the Section of Communicable Disease Control in Anchorage, Alaska at 279-9417.