



Diphtheria and environmental health

This guidance supports Environmental Health Practitioners to undertake Healthy Home Assessments where there is diphtheria in the community. It includes general advice for all Healthy Home Assessments, with specific advice for responding to a clinic-generated environmental health referral for diphtheria.

A prompt Healthy Home Assessment is an important part of holistic care. It helps identify environmental health issues that may affect healthy living practices or increase the spread of disease.

This guidance complements Healthy Home Assessment and infection prevention procedures – always follow advice from your local Public Health Unit.

General advice for all Healthy Home Assessments

With diphtheria present in the community or region, there are steps which you should follow to protect yourself, your clients and the community when undertaking all Healthy Home Assessments.

- Ensure your vaccinations are up to date and get a diphtheria booster if you have not had one in the past 5 years – if you are unsure check with your clinic.
- Do not undertake visits if you are unwell.
- Cover any cuts or wounds with a waterproof dressing.
- Take the supplies you may need for the visit e.g. disinfectant wipes, disposable gloves and alcohol-based hand gel.
- Follow standard precautions:
 - wash your hands with soap and running water, or use an alcohol-based hand gel:
 - before entering, and after leaving every home
 - after touching potentially contaminated surfaces, shared equipment or household items
 - wear gloves when touching taps, benches, toilets, sinks and potentially contaminated surfaces or household items
 - clean and disinfect shared equipment between homes
 - always follow your organisation's infection prevention procedures.

Specific advice for a clinic-generated referral for diphtheria

Environmental Health Practitioners do not provide treatment for people with diphtheria. Your role is to ensure the home environment supports healthy living while protecting yourself, other people in the home, and the wider community. These steps should be followed in addition to the general advice for all Healthy Home Assessments.

See the [diphtheria factsheet for Aboriginal Environmental Health Practitioners](#) for a list of diphtheria symptoms.

Before the Healthy Home Assessment

- Read the referral carefully and follow any advice from the treating clinician or Public Health Unit.
- Confirm whether additional precautions have been identified by the referring clinician or Public Health Unit.
- If the client, or other members of the household, are still undergoing antibiotic treatment or have respiratory symptoms, postpone non-urgent environmental health work. Most households are likely to have completed antibiotics within around 2 weeks.
- Only enter the household after confirming that no-one in the home has symptoms of diphtheria or is still being treated by the clinic for diphtheria.
- If you cannot safely enter the household, have a yarn with the householders outside to provide practical advice, education and any hygiene resources.

During the Healthy Home Assessment

- If you can safely enter the household, assess whether the home has working health hardware to support:
 - hand washing
 - showering
 - cleaning
 - washing clothes and bedding.
- Support householders to report health hardware issues to the housing maintenance teams.
- Focus on fixing environmental health issues that may affect healthy living or increase the spread of disease.
- No additional personal protective equipment is usually required if there are no symptoms of diphtheria, and no extra precautions have been recommended by the Public Health Unit.

After the Healthy Home Assessment

- Clean and disinfect equipment and tools with a detergent/disinfectant wipe before returning items to your car.
- Use an alcohol-based hand gel after cleaning and disinfecting equipment and tools.
- Complete feedback for the referring clinic of when you visited, what was done and any other important information.
- Notify the clinic if significant environmental health risks remain that may affect the health of the client or other household members.
- Dispose of personal protective equipment, gloves and wipes in a plastic bag and dispose of them away from the home.

Key things to remember

- Environmental Health clinic referrals remain an important part of holistic client care and should be responded to promptly.
- The Healthy Home Assessment helps make sure the home environment allows for healthy living and reduces the spread of disease.
- To protect yourself, your client and the community, routine inspections, follow-up visits and other non-urgent environmental health work should be postponed until after the client and any affected household members have completed their antibiotics and recovered from their illness.