

Unprotected People #26

Diphtheria

A death from diphtheria

The following story was contributed via e-mail by an IAC EXPRESS reader, Carolyn Hardman, RN, and is reprinted here with her permission.

In 1961, I tended my young cousin while her mother went to work. She was ill with a fever and complained of a sore throat. The next morning she was unable to breathe and began turning blue. An ambulance was called and she was transported to St. Mark's Hospital in North Salt Lake. The doctors there performed a tracheotomy and did everything they could for her, but she passed away that afternoon from diphtheria. Later that week I also became very ill, as did my aunt and another cousin. Although I never became ill enough to be hospitalized, my aunt and cousin were in the hospital by the end of the week.

I had been immunized against diphtheria as an infant, but had never had a booster. My case at age 15 was

considered mild, but I thought it was awful. Like my young cousin, I suffered from a high fever and experienced difficulty breathing. I survived and have never missed a booster immunization. All of my children and grandchildren also have been fully immunized.

My young cousin who passed away at the age of two was not so fortunate. Her mother had never gotten around to getting her vaccinated. My cousin would have survived the attack of diphtheria if she had only been immunized. Her mother and brother both survived and have since become great supporters of immunization. But nothing can bring back little Lois—no matter how much we all wish things had been different.

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