



MEDIA STATEMENT

29 APRIL 2026

AMSANT urges early presentation and vaccination as diphtheria outbreak grows

The Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory (AMSANT) acknowledges the growing diphtheria outbreak in the Northern Territory and the serious risks it presents to individuals, families and communities.

AMSANT is urging Territorians to visit their local clinic and seek early care if they have symptoms such as sore throats or skin sores, and to ensure their vaccinations are up to date.

There have been 84 cases of diphtheria reported in the Northern Territory between 1 January 2025 and 24 April 2026. This includes 18 cases of respiratory diphtheria and 66 cases of cutaneous cases (skin sores), with more than 90% of cases affecting Aboriginal people. Around one-third of cases have required hospitalisation.

Diphtheria is a serious bacterial infection that can be life threatening in people who are not adequately vaccinated, with unvaccinated children under five known to be most at risk of poor outcomes if they are unvaccinated. Vaccination remains the best protection against serious illness.

“Diphtheria can spread quickly, but we know that vaccination is the best way to reduce the risk of serious disease,” AMSANT CEO Donna Ah Chee said.

“It is important that people take steps to protect themselves and their families. If you have a sore throat or skin sores, it’s important to visit your local clinic early. Everyone needs to ensure that their vaccinations are up to date.”

Ms Ah Chee said the outbreak highlights the need to protect those most at risk, particularly in remote communities.

“In the Northern Territory, factors such as overcrowded housing, remoteness and limited access to care can increase transmission,” she said.

“These outbreaks tend to have the greatest impact on the most vulnerable people in our communities, such as those at higher risk or with barriers to accessing health care, which is why the response must be targeted, accessible and culturally safe.”

She said Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHSs) are central to the outbreak response and are best placed to deliver vaccination, treatment and public health support.

“Our member services are on the frontline — they are trusted, they know their communities, and they are already doing the work to get vaccines and treatment to the people who need them,” she said.

AMSANT is encouraging Territorians to:

- Make sure children are up to date with routine vaccinations, including adolescent boosters

- Check their own vaccination status with their local clinic
- Seek care early if they have symptoms or are concerned

“We are seeing that people who are vaccinated are much less likely to become seriously unwell,” she said. “There is effective treatment available, but getting care early is critical.”

AMSANT has worked closely with the Northern Territory Government to ensure additional workforce capacity, and a strong public health response.

“This is about making sure the response reaches communities quickly and that services have the support they need to manage the outbreak and keep our communities safe and well.”

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