



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: January, 2014

Contact: Lisa Schobert, Vaccine Coordinator (907)443-9654 lschobert@nshcorp.org
Contact: Dawyn Sawyer, PA (907)443-3311 dsawyer@nshcorp.org

NOME, ALASKA – In an effort to promote vaccine awareness Lisa Schobert, Vaccine Coordinator and Dawyn Sawyer, PA along with their team will send the diphtheria vaccine on the Iditarod dog sled race which starts March 1, 2014.

During this athletic event, musher Martin Buser will carry the DTaP vaccine and musher Aliy Zirkle will carry the Tdap vaccine over 1049 miles of the Iditarod dog sled race from Anchorage to Nome, Alaska. Martin is known for his playful spirit and is expected to hand off the vaccine to other mushers yet recapture it towards the finish line in Nome. Aliy is known for her competitive heart and is expected to carry the vaccine all the way to Nome. It's anyone's race and you never know what will happen. Alaska weather plays an enormous factor in the race along with the stamina of the athletes.

In 1925 a diphtheria outbreak occurred in Nome, Alaska. Dr. Curtis Welch recognized the outbreak and requested assistance from around the country. Nome had enough diphtheria antitoxin for only a few patients and a significant amount more was needed to treat all infected with the deadly diphtheria bacteria. An Anchorage doctor located part of the needed antitoxin and the serum was placed on a train from Anchorage to Nenana, Alaska. The only way to continue the transport of the antitoxin was via dog sled. In a relay team style, the serum was taken from Nenana to Nome, Alaska via many dog teams. Blizzard weather and negative temperatures caused the dog teams to travel through severe conditions and eventually the antitoxin reached Nome.

In 1973 The Last Great Race ® sled dog race began. It's simply called the Iditarod (www.iditarod.com). Historians quote several reasons as to why the race began. Joe Redington desired to revitalize dog mushing. Joe had one thought; Dorothy Page had another and The State of Alaska yet another.

Ten vaccine vials will be placed in one box and sent with Buser and Zirkle. Each box weighs 2.3 ounces. Dr. Karen O'neill is the physician at Norton Sound Health Corporation (NSHC) who will receive the vaccine when it arrives. School children from all over the country will follow the lessons provided from Jen Reiter, Teacher on the Trail.

Dawyn Sawyer, PA will host several presentations in March, around the history of the 1925 diphtheria run. Her goal is to educate people about the continued need for vaccines. History is something that can be easily forgotten. Sawyer has a great interest in the history of medicine as it impacts our medical care today. Nome will also host several immunization events where community people can come and receive vaccinations.

DTaP stands for diphtheria, tetanus and acellular pertussis. Tdap is tetanus, diphtheria and acellular pertussis. The nomenclature of the capitalization indicates the amount of the antigen in the vaccine.

T. 907.443.3311 | F. 907.443.2113 | P.O. BOX 966, NOME, ALASKA 99762-0966 | www.nortonsoundhealth.org

NORTON SOUND HEALTH CORPORATION

Providing quality health services and promoting wellness within our people and environment.



Lisa Schobert, Vaccine Coordinator and Dawyn Sawyer, PA

Photo by: Susanne Thomas

Electronic version of photo can be obtained from north2alaska.us
the internet or by contacting Lisa or Dawyn

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