
VACCINE POINTS

“Vaccine Points” is a bi-monthly communication distributed by the Hawaii Department of Health to all participating Vaccines for Children (VFC) providers.

Test your vaccine knowledge.

Question: Which vaccine preventable disease is linked to the Alaskan Iditarod Trail Race?

Answer: Diphtheria



The original “Great Race of Mercy” occurred when dog mushers from around Alaska joined forces to carry life-saving diphtheria serum to Nome. In January 1925, 2 children died of diphtheria in Nome and the town faced the possibility of an outbreak of diphtheria that could kill most of the region’s population. The town’s doctor sent dozens of telegrams pleading for help to find and deliver antitoxin. The closest supply was in Anchorage, hundreds of miles away. There were no railroads to Nome, air service was unavailable, and ships could not reach the town because of sea ice. The only way in was overland via the Iditarod Trail. Alaska’s territorial Governor approved a relay of the 20 best mail carrier mushers, who completed the “Great Race of Mercy” in a record 5 days and 7 hours. Although at least five children died during the outbreak, the collective efforts of hundreds of people to deliver the diphtheria antitoxin prevented the deaths of many other children in Nome and the surrounding area. Since 1973, the Iditarod Trail Race has been run annually in memory of this original sled dog relay.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention About CDC 24-7

- Iditarod: Celebrating the “Great Race of Mercy” to Stop Diphtheria Outbreak in Alaska <https://www.cdc.gov/about/24-7/savinglives/diphtheria/index.html>
- A National Vaccine Campaign <https://www.cdc.gov/about/24-7/savinglives/diphtheria/campaign.html>