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IN ENGLISH

HEALTH SCARE

Six-year-old diagnosed with first case of diphtheria in Spain since 1987

Young boy from Olot had not been vaccinated despite free service from health authorities

JESSICA MOUZO QUINTÁNS | Barcelona | 3 JUN 2015 - 09:09 CEST



A child gets his shots at a hospital. / GETTY

A six-year-old child who lives in the Catalan city of Olot (Girona) has been admitted to hospital with the first recorded case of diphtheria in Spain since 1987.

Catalan health authorities have confirmed that the little boy had not been immunized against the infectious disease, despite the free vaccination programs offered by Spanish public health services.

The Russian ambassador to Spain managed to bring the drug via plane from Moscow to Barcelona in the early hours of Monday morning”

According to information obtained by EL PAÍS, he had not been vaccinated given that his parents are against the practice.

The child, who was initially taken into his local hospital and quickly transferred to Barcelona’s Vall d’Hebron center, is currently in the intensive care unit.

There he is being treated with an anti-toxin, a drug that the Health Ministry had to search for worldwide. The World Health Organization and the health authorities in the United States were among those to whom the ministry went for help. “The problem is that these days, no one has this illness. Everyone is vaccinated,” the general secretary for the health service, Rubén Moreno, told EL PAÍS.

Eventually, the Russian ambassador to Spain managed to bring the drug via plane from Moscow to Barcelona in the early hours of Monday morning. Further doses were due to arrive on Tuesday night.

Diphtheria is an infectious disease caused by the bacterium *Corynebacterium diphtheriae*, which is most often likely to affect children under five and adults over 60. It is spread through direct contact or through the air, and can cause severe respiratory problems.

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The last two known patients with diphtheria in Spain were treated in 1987, according to the Health Ministry.

One out of every 10 patients dies from complications derived from the early symptoms.

The existing vaccine does not protect against infection, but against the effects of the toxin that the bacterium produces. According to the Spanish Vaccine Society, systematic vaccination programs in Spain have covered more than 90 percent of the population.

In recent years, campaigns against vaccinations – due to their perceived health risk – have gained ground among parents, particularly in the United States. General secretary for the health service, Rubén Moreno, called these campaigns “irresponsible.” He continued: “The consequences of not vaccinating a child can be dramatic. The right to vaccination is for children, not for the parents to decide.”

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