

# Diphtheria Immunizations available

**ANCHORAGE** — Even as 73 mushers and their dog teams prepared to set out for Nome in the world famous Iditarod race on March 1, the state of Alaska was conducting a race of its own — to immunize 200,000 people against diphtheria and tetanus.

In commemoration of the heroic Anchorage-to-Nome serum relay that inspired the modern Iditarod sled dog race, the state of Alaska's Public Health Department and a number of corporate and civic organizations have been working together to offer free inoculations to all urban adult Alaskans (age 18 and over) against diphtheria, which ravaged Nome in 1925 and portions of the Railbelt region from Anchorage to Kenai again in 1975.

At the time of the 1975 outbreak, in which 13 people contracted this painful and potentially fatal disease (and one actually died), the state

mobilized to vaccinate 183,000 people, stopping the spread of the disease. Diphtheria and tetanus boosters, however, have only an effective life of approximately 10 years. The state is therefore working to re-immunize the adult population in a cycle that will hopefully eradicate the disease forever in Alaska.

Liz Gilbert, marketing director for Alascom and a member of the statewide steering committee for the immunization program, also developed the Corporate Challenge, where participating companies can engage in friendly competition for the highest percentage of immunized employees. The response has been tremendous, with ARCO, Enstar, Alascom and Providence and Humana Hospitals among the first to commit their participation.