

Haemophilus influenzae type B

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Hib disease?

Haemophilus influenzae (huh-mof-ill-us in-floo-en-za) type b, or Hib for short, is an infection caused by the bacterium *Haemophilus influenzae*. The most common type of invasive Hib disease is meningitis, an infection of the membranes that cover the spinal cord and brain. It usually affects young children under the age of 5. There are six different types of this bacteria (a, b, c, d, e and f). While all types of the bacteria may cause infection, *H. influenzae* type b can cause severe disease in children.

Who gets Hib disease?

Hib at one time was the leading cause of bacterial meningitis or pneumonia among infants and children younger than 5 years of age. In 1988 the Hib vaccine was made available. Since the Hib vaccine is now routinely given to infants and children, the number of Hib disease cases in the United States has declined by more than 95%. Currently, Hib disease occurs mostly in infants who are not fully immunized and is most common among those between 6 to 18 months of age. While Hib is not common among adults or children older than 5 years, people with certain long-term health conditions or weak immune systems are at higher risk for Hib disease.

How do people get Hib disease?

Hib bacteria are spread from person to person. Some people carry Hib bacteria in their nose and do not become infected. They can, however, pass the bacteria to others who may become sick. People can also become sick if they come in contact with the mucus or saliva (spit) from an infected person who is not getting treatment.

What are the symptoms of Hib disease?

Symptoms of Hib depend on what part of the body is affected by the bacteria. Most often, Hib bacteria will cause meningitis. Symptoms of meningitis include:

- Fever
- Decreased mental status
- Stiff neck

Other forms of Hib infection include pneumonia, epiglottitis (an infection and swelling of the throat that can block the airway) and bone or joint infection.

How is Hib disease diagnosed?

If a health care provider suspects Hib, samples of the patient's blood or spinal fluid will be examined.

What is the treatment for Hib disease?

Your health care provider can prescribe antibiotics to treat Hib. (NOTE: It is very important to finish your antibiotics even if you begin to feel better, unless otherwise directed by your health care provider.) People with Hib are no longer able to spread it to others after taking antibiotics for 24 to 48 hours.

How can Hib be prevented?

- Protect your children by having them immunized with the Hib vaccine. The vaccine is a series of four shots and is given at 2, 4, 6 and 15 months of age.
- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue. Throw away used tissues immediately.
- Wash hands frequently.

Where can I get more information on Hib?

- Your health care provider
- Your local health department
- NJ Department of Health www.nj.gov/health
- Centers for Disease Control & Prevention www.cdc.gov

This information is intended for educational purposes only and is not intended to replace consultation with a health care professional. Adapted from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.