

# HAEMOPHILUS INFLUENZAE TYPE B (HIB)



## What is *Haemophilus influenzae* type b (Hib) disease?

Hib is a bacterial illness that can lead to a potentially deadly brain infection in young children. Hib may cause diseases such as meningitis (inflammation of the coverings of the brain and spinal column), bloodstream infections, pneumonia, arthritis and infections of other parts of the body.

## Who gets Hib disease?

Hib disease can occur in any age. Before the development of a vaccine, Hib was the leading cause of bacterial meningitis among children less than five years of age. Since the introduction in 1988 and the widespread use of the Hib vaccine, the number of new cases of Hib disease in infants and young children decreased by 99 percent to fewer than one case per 100,000 children younger than five years of age. Now, Hib is seen more commonly in the elderly, unvaccinated or incompletely vaccinated children, and people with a weakened immune system.

## How is Hib disease spread?

Hib disease may be transmitted through contact with mucus or droplets from the nose and throat of an infected person.

## What are the symptoms of Hib disease?

Symptoms may include fever, lethargy, vomiting and a stiff neck. Other symptoms depend upon the part of the body affected.

## How soon do symptoms appear?

The incubation period for Hib disease is unknown, but is probably less than one week.

## When and for how long is a person able to spread Hib disease?

The contagious period varies. Unless treated, it may be transmitted for as long as the organism is present in the nose and throat, even after symptoms have disappeared.

## Does past infection with Hib disease make a person immune?

Children who had Hib disease when younger than 24 months of age may be at risk of getting Hib disease again. Children and adults who had Hib disease when 24 months of age or older are likely to be immune.

## What is the treatment for Hib disease?

Antibiotics, such as cefotaxime, ceftriaxone, or ampicillin with chloramphenicol, are generally used to treat serious infections. Rifampin is used in some circumstances as preventive treatment for persons who have been exposed to Hib disease.

## What are the possible complications associated with Hib disease?

If Hib meningitis occurs, death occurs in one out of 20 children and permanent brain damage in ten to 30 percent of the survivors.

## What can be done to prevent the spread of Hib disease?

All children less than 5 years of age should be immunized with an approved Hib vaccine beginning at two months of age. Older children and adults with certain conditions such as sickle cell disease, removal of the spleen, or cancer treatment should also be vaccinated.