

Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib) Infections

WHAT IS IT?

Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib) is a type of bacteria. It causes very severe infections in children, but rarely infects adults.

Hib can cause a number of infections including:

- Meningitis (an infection of the lining of the brain)
- Epiglottitis (an infection of the windpipe)
- Cellulitis (infection deep in the skin)
- Pneumonia
- Joint infections
- Bacterial tracheitis (croupy cough with breathing problems)

Hib infections do not spread very easily from child to child. Sometimes they spread within households or child care centres. Children who are under 2 years of age are most at risk.

After one child gets the disease, treating all member of a household with an antibiotic can often prevent the spread of the Hib infection. Your physician, in consultation with the local public health agency, will decide whether to give antibiotics to prevent the spread of infection. All Hib infections are very serious and have to be treated in hospital with antibiotics given through a vein (intravenously).

There is a vaccine available to prevent Hib infections called Pentacel. It consists of a series of injections starting at 2 months of age. This vaccine is part of the routine childhood immunization and is included with an injection against diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus and polio.

THINGS PARENTS CAN DO

- If another child has been diagnosed with Haemophilus influenzae type b, contact your physician immediately if your child seems ill with any of the following:
 - Fever
 - Excessive sleepiness
 - Excessive crankiness or fussiness
 - A stiff neck (unwillingness to move the head up and down)
 - Vomiting
 - Rapid or difficult breathing
 - New or increased amount of drooling
 - A sore throat
 - Pain on swallowing or refusal to swallow

- Await instructions from your local public health agency about whether or not antibiotics should be given to prevent other children from getting Hib infection.
- Check your child's immunization record. If your child has not had the Hib vaccine and is between 2 months and 5 years of age, the child should be immunized. This vaccine is not a substitute for antibiotics in preventing or treating Hib disease.
- A child with the Hib infection may return to the child care facility following treatment. This decision should be made by the physician in consultation with the local public health agency.
- **Hib disease can be prevented by immunization.**

WHAT DO I DO IF I HAVE MORE QUESTIONS?

Call the Health Unit at 1-800-660-5853.

Source: Canadian Paediatric Society