

# Haemophilus Influenzae B (Hib)

## What is Haemophilus Influenzae type B (Hib)?

Haemophilus Influenzae type B (Hib) is a bacteria that causes different types of infections, especially in children under the age of 5. It can also cause infection in adolescents and adults who have weak immune systems. Depending on the type of infection, the disease can be mild, severe or even life-threatening.

Before the introduction of the Hib vaccine, Hib was the most common cause of bacterial meningitis in children two months to five years of age. Meningitis is a serious infection of the fluid and lining that covers the spinal cord. Meningitis can cause brain damage, learning and developmental problems, deafness and blindness.

The Hib bacteria can also cause serious infections of the throat near the voice box. This infection is called epiglottitis and can make it difficult for the child to breathe. The Hib bacteria can also cause infection of the lungs (pneumonia), bone and joint infections.

## Who is at risk?

Children under five years are more likely to get Hib disease. Children attending childcare centres are even more likely to catch it.

## How does it spread?

The bacteria are found in the nose and throat and are spread through droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes. The infection can also be spread by having direct contact with fluids from the nose and throat of an infected person. Touching things that were recently exposed to an infected person's mucous or saliva (shared utensils, cups, tissues and toys) then rubbing eyes, nose or mouth can also spread the bacteria.

## Methods of prevention:

As part of the routine immunization schedule, children get a vaccine that protects them against Hib disease starting at the age of 2 months of age. It is also given to adolescents and adults who have health conditions that put them at higher risk of Hib infection.

Source: Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, Public Health Division.

*This fact sheet provides basic information only. It must not take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always talk to a health care professional about any health concerns.*

For further information contact the Infectious Disease Program at 625-8318  
or toll free 1-888-294-6630, ext. 8318.

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