

Hib (Haemophilus Influenza type b) Information Sheet

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What is it?

Hib is the short name for *Haemophilus influenzae type b*. Hib is a bacteria that lives in the nose and throat and is spread by coughing and sneezing. There are six types of Hib and they can cause mild to very serious sickness.

Hib can cause very serious sickness such as meningitis, pneumonia, blood poisoning and epiglottitis.

Even though it has *influenza* in its full name, Hib is not the same as the flu caused by the influenza virus.

What are the signs and symptoms?

Hib can cause a range of different infections which means the symptoms will vary depending on which part of the body is affected.

The symptoms for older children and adults are:

- fever
- loss of appetite
- vomiting
- being sleepy or hard to wake
- headache
- dislike of bright light
- stiff neck
- difficulty swallowing or breathing
- dribbling
- noisy breathing.

The above symptoms may be hard to see in small children and babies but you might see them:

- not feeding well
- being irritable or grumpy
- having a bulging fontanelle

Normal fontanelle



Bulging fontanelle



How serious is it?

A child or adult who may have Hib needs to see a doctor. There are different types of Hib. They can cause a range of problems affecting breathing, joints and the nervous system. Serious Hib infections can result in lifelong disability or death.

The different types of Hib infections include:

- meningitis - infection around the brain and spinal cord
- epiglottitis - swelling in the throat that makes it hard to breathe
- pneumonia - infection in the lungs
- blood poisoning
- other blood, bone, heart and joint infections.

Hib is a notifiable disease under the Health Act. This means your doctor must tell the District Health Board (DHB) if they suspect you have it. A Communicable Disease Nurse will contact you or your family for information to help stop other people from getting Hib.

Who is most at risk?

All babies and children under 5 years of age are at risk of Hib infections. Children under 2 years are more likely to develop meningitis and children aged 2-4 years are more likely to develop epiglottitis.

Children living in large or crowded households, and with lots of other children, are more at the risk of Hib. A small number of adults also get Hib, often causing pneumonia in the elderly.

How could I get infected?

Hib is spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes and tiny drops of the bacteria land on people and surfaces that people touch. Some people who spread the bacteria have it in their noses and throats but are not ill.

How do I protect myself and others?

The best way to protect against Hib is immunisation. A free vaccine is available for babies and young children. Babies are given the vaccine against Hib at 6 weeks, 3 months and 5 months and a booster at 15 months of age. Having these four vaccines means they are immunised against Hib. Older children and adults may also benefit from immunisation.

You can also protect yourself and others by:

- avoiding overcrowded living conditions
- avoiding sharing food, drinks and cutlery
- staying away from people who are coughing and sneezing
- covering your mouth when coughing or sneezing
- washing your hands after coughing or sneezing.

Will I need to take time off work, school or preschool?

Children with Hib should not go to preschool, day care or school. Children and adults with Hib should stay away from other people until 24 hours after starting antibiotics.

If you are in close contact with a person with Hib, you may also need to take antibiotics to stop you from catching Hib. You will also need to stay away from other people, preschool, school and work until you've finished four days of antibiotics.

How is it treated?

Sometimes Hib infects parts of the body that are normally germ free such as the blood or spinal fluid. This is called invasive Hib and usually means a person needs to go to hospital.

Even with antibiotics 3-6% of children who get Hib meningitis disease will die.

When Hib causes a less serious, non-invasive infection, such as bronchitis or an ear infection, antibiotics might still be prescribed to prevent other health problems.

Where can I get further information?

For further information on Hib please contact your doctor or Hawke's Bay District Health Board Population Health on (06) 834 1815. You can also phone Healthline on 0800 611 116 at any time of the day or night to speak to a registered nurse.

For more information on immunisation go to www.immune.org.nz.