

# Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib)

## Community and Public Health

Phone: 03 364 1777

Fax: 03 379 6484

Web: [www.cph.co.nz](http://www.cph.co.nz)

**Hib** stands for Haemophilus Influenzae type b. This is a bacteria that can cause serious disease including meningitis.

Cases are very uncommon these days because young children are immunised with the Hib vaccine.

Hib was the leading cause of bacterial meningitis in children under five years before a vaccine was available. Despite its name, Hib is not related to influenza ('flu').

The main diseases that Hib can cause are:

- Meningitis (infection of the membranes around the brain and spinal cord).
- Epiglottitis (severe swelling of the epiglottis at the back of the throat).
- Pneumonia (infection of the lungs).
- Osteomyelitis (infection of the bones and joints).
- Cellulitis (infection of the tissue under the skin, usually on the face).

### What are the symptoms?

Symptoms depend on where the infection is.

- **Meningitis:** fever, headache, stiff neck, nausea, vomiting and drowsiness. Younger children and infants may also have a high pitched cry.
- **Pneumonia:** shortness of breath, fever, lack of energy, loss of appetite, headache, chest pain and cough.
- **Epiglottitis:** difficulty breathing and swallowing, pale colour and fever.
- **Osteomyelitis:** swelling, inflammation and pain over the affected bone.

**NOTE:** Both meningitis and epiglottitis can develop quickly and can rapidly cause death if left untreated.

**Seek medical assistance immediately if you suspect symptoms.**

### How is Hib spread?

The bacteria live in the throat and of some people who may not have symptoms. However they can spread the bacteria to others by coughing or sneezing and sometimes these people develop one of the Hib diseases.

### How is spread prevented?

There are a few things you can do to avoid getting infected or passing the illness on to others:

- Ensure children are vaccinated against Hib.
- Limit close physical contact when coughing and sneezing.
- Remember to cover the mouth and wash hands thoroughly after coughing and sneezing.
- Do not share food, drinks and eating utensils.

### Who is at risk?

Children under 5 years, those with suppressed immunity and those with no spleen or a non-functioning spleen are most at risk of catching a Hib disease.

Other factors contributing to the risk of Hib include:

- Living in a crowded household;
- Attending a child care centre; and
- Having school-aged brothers and sisters.

### How is it prevented?

Hib vaccine is included in the National Childhood Immunisation Schedule and is free to all children under the age of 5 years. A Hib vaccination is recommended for all infants at: six weeks, three months, five months and fifteen months (a total of four doses).

### How is it treated?

A person with Hib infection is usually admitted to hospital and treated with antibiotics.

### Time off preschool or school

A child who has been sick with Hib can only return to preschool or school after treatment with the appropriate antibiotics and if the doctor considers that the child has recovered and is non-infectious.

