



## Durham Region Health Department **Facts about...**



# Haemophilus Influenzae Type B

## What is it?

*Haemophilus influenzae* type b (*Haemophilus b* or Hib) infection is caused by a germ that can cause meningitis and other infections. Meningitis is a serious infection of the fluid and lining that covers the brain and spinal cord. Hib can also affect the epiglottis (in the throat), blood, lungs, joints, bones, and skin. Children under 5 years of age and children who attend childcare centers are at the highest risk for Hib infection. Other population at increased risk includes adults 65 years or older and people with weak immune system.

Hib infection occurs worldwide, however, since the introduction of the vaccine in 1987, its incidence has decreased by 94%.

## How is it spread?

The Hib germ can be spread from person to person through close, direct contact, such as when an infected person coughs or sneezes into the face of another. It can also be spread by oral contact, such as kissing or sharing drinks. Bacteria can survive outside of the body for several hours, so spread may also occur by touching contaminated objects (e.g., toys shared between children).

## What do I look for?

Symptoms of Hib infections can develop quickly (in a matter of a few hours) or more gradually (over a few days). Symptoms can be mild to severe. The most common is an infection of the nose and throat with no symptoms but can lead to ear infections, eye infections and pneumonia. Symptoms can include fever, loss of appetite, nausea and vomiting and, in the case of pneumonia, cough and difficulty breathing. Invasive Hib infections are the least common but cause the most severe symptoms. Examples of invasive infections include:

- Meningitis: Inflammation of the membranes of the brain and spinal cord, which results in fever, headache, stiff neck and change in consciousness or behavior.
- Epiglottitis: Infection of the flap of cartilage at the back of the throat, which results in sore throat and difficulty breathing that progresses rapidly. It is considered a medical emergency.

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- Bacteremia: Bacteria in the bloodstream may result in fever, chills, low blood pressure and may lead to sepsis.
- Infections of the joints and bones result in sudden onset of fever, pain in the affected area, redness and swelling.

## How is it treated?

In less severe cases, antibiotics can be taken by mouth. In more severe cases of infection, treatment may include 10 or more days of IV antibiotics. People who have been in close contact with someone with a Hib infection may be recommended to take antibiotics to prevent them from getting sick.

## How can I protect myself?

- Hib infection is best prevented by vaccination.
- See 'Facts About... Diphtheria, Pertussis, Tetanus, Polio', and 'Haemophilus influenzae B Vaccine'.
- Keep up to date with vaccinations and speak to your health care provider about your need for other vaccines.
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water or use hand sanitizer when hands are not visibly dirty.
- Cough or sneeze into your elbow and encourage others to do the same.
- Wash your hands after handling nose and throat secretions (e.g., after throwing out facial tissues containing nose and throat secretions).
- Do not share water bottles, straws, eating utensils, cigarettes, toothbrushes, toys or anything that has been in contact with saliva, nose or throat secretions.
- If you are ill, stay at home and isolate yourself from others.

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