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What is *Haemophilus influenzae* type b (Hib) disease?

Haemophilus influenzae is a type of bacteria that is commonly found in the nose and throat of children and adults. A particular type, *Haemophilus influenzae* serotype b (Hib), can invade the body and cause serious infections. Hib may cause meningitis (inflammation of the coverings of the spinal column and brain), bloodstream infections, pneumonia, arthritis, and infections in other parts of the body. Despite its name, this disease has nothing to do with the influenza (flu) virus.

Who gets Hib disease?

Hib disease can occur at any age. Although Hib was once the leading cause of bacterial meningitis among young children, few childhood cases are reported now due to widespread use of Hib vaccination. Hib disease is more commonly seen in unimmunized or incompletely immunized children, especially those less than five years of age, and in people with weakened immune systems.

What are the symptoms of Hib disease?

Symptoms of meningitis may include fever, headache, vomiting, nausea, listlessness, and a stiff neck or back. Pneumonia symptoms may include shortness of breath, fever, lack of energy, chest pain, and cough. Other symptoms depend upon the part of body infected.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

Symptoms generally appear in less than 10 days after exposure and more commonly within 2-4 days.

How is Hib disease spread?

Hib disease is transmitted through contact with mucus or droplets from the nose and throat of an infected person often by coughing or sneezing. Hib is also spread by people who have the bacteria in their noses and throats but are not ill (asymptomatic).

How long can an infected person carry Hib disease?

The contagious period varies and, unless treated, may last as long as the organism is in the nose and throat, even after symptoms disappear. A person can no longer spread Hib disease after taking the proper antibiotics for 1-2 days.

What is the treatment for Hib disease?

Specific antibiotics are used to treat serious infections.

How can Hib disease be prevented?

Hib vaccinations are available. All children should be vaccinated against Hib disease beginning at approximately two months of age. Multiple doses are needed to ensure protection. Some older children and adults with weakened immune systems are at increased risk for infection and should be vaccinated if they were not immunized in childhood. Contact your physician or local health department for further information about vaccination.

How can I learn more about Hib disease?

- If you have concerns about Hib disease, contact your healthcare provider.
- Call your local health department. A directory of local health departments is located at the [VDH Local Health Districts page](#).
- Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at [the CDC page on Hib disease](#).

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