



Haemophilus Influenzae b disease, invasive

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

Hib disease is caused by the *Haemophilus Influenzae b* bacteria that can cause serious illness, especially in young children. Hib disease can lead to complications like meningitis (inflammation of the coverings of the brain and spinal cord), bloodstream infections, pneumonia, arthritis and infections of other parts of the body. Despite the name, it is not related to influenza. Since an effective vaccine has been available, very few cases of Hib disease are now diagnosed.

How is it spread?

The Hib bacteria is commonly present in the nose and throat. Bacteria are spread from person to person in droplets through sneezing and/or coughing. Sometimes the bacteria can enter the blood or spinal fluid (referred to as “invasive disease”) and can cause serious infection. People can carry the Hib bacteria and spread the disease without becoming ill themselves.

What are the symptoms?

Fever is one symptom that is present in all forms of Hib infections. Other symptoms of Hib infection depend on the part of the body affected. Meningitis is the most common illness of invasive Hib disease, followed by epiglottitis and bloodstream infections. Symptoms of meningitis may include sudden onset of fever, vomiting, lethargy and stiff neck. Epiglottitis is a medical emergency as swelling of the epiglottis can lead to difficulty breathing and can be life-threatening.

How soon do symptoms of Hib disease appear?

Symptoms generally appear less than 10 days after exposure, usually within two to four days.

How is Hib disease diagnosed?

The diagnosis is usually made based on laboratory tests using a sample of infected body fluid, like blood or spinal fluid.

How long is a person with Hib disease contagious?

The contagious period varies and, unless treated, can last for as long as the bacteria is present in the nose and throat, even after symptoms have disappeared. A person can no longer spread Hib disease after taking antibiotics for one to two days.

What is the treatment for Hib disease?

Antibiotics are generally used to treat serious infections.

How do I protect myself and others?

The most important way to prevent Hib disease is vaccination.

The following are also helpful in preventing the spread of illness:

- Cover mouth and nose when coughing and/or sneezing
- Do not drink from the same glass, water bottle, or straw of others
- Do not share cigarettes
- Wash your hands well after coughs, sneezes, going to the washroom and before eating or preparing food. This is important because hand to mouth contact is a common way of spreading many germs.

Sometimes the Hib infection spreads to other people who have had close or lengthy contact with a person with Hib disease. In certain cases, people in close contact with that person should receive antibiotics to prevent them from getting the disease. This is known as prophylaxis. Public Health will contact those that may need prophylaxis.

Is there anything special I need to know about Hib disease?

While non-type b *H. influenzae* bacteria are capable of causing invasive disease, in Ontario only invasive disease caused by serotype b is reportable to Public Health.

For more information please call the Communicable Disease Team: ext. 8809