

HAEMOPHILUS INFLUENZAE TYPE B

What is *Haemophilus influenza* type b?

***Haemophilus influenzae* type b (Hib) is a type of bacteria that can cause serious illness, especially in children under five years of age, children in daycare and immune-suppressed people.**

Before the availability of a Hib vaccine in 1988, the bacteria was the most common cause of bacterial meningitis (infection of the lining of the brain and spinal cord), epiglottitis (a form of croup which can threaten a child's breathing) and pneumonia (infection of the lungs) in young children.

About 5% of children who were infected with Hib died, and 10 to 20% of children who survived suffered permanent damage such as deafness or brain damage. Fortunately, the occurrence of serious Hib infection is now uncommon in Canada due to universal immunization.

Despite its name, *Haemophilus influenza* type b is not related to influenza (also known as the flu.)

What are the symptoms of Hib?

Symptoms develop between two and four days after becoming infected with the bacteria and vary depending upon the part of the body affected.

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| Hib meningitis: | Fever, vomiting, drowsiness, headache, bulging fontanelle (soft spot on baby's head) in infants, stiff neck and back in older children |
| Hib pneumonia: | Chest pain, coughing, chills, fever, difficulty breathing, coughing up green phlegm, sweating |
| Hib epiglottitis: | Swelling of the epiglottis, sudden onset of fever, sore throat, difficulty breathing, difficulty swallowing, drooling |

How does Hib spread?

Hib spreads from person to person through inhaling or having direct contact with the respiratory droplets or secretions from an infected person's mouth, nose and throat while they are contagious.

How is Hib treated?

Individuals with invasive Hib disease should start antibiotics immediately to eliminate further spread. A health care provider may recommend antibiotic treatment for people in close contact with someone with a Hib infection. Antibiotics may prevent close contacts from getting sick or infecting others.

Your health care provider can recommend treatment options if you suspect you may have Hib or may have come in close contact with someone with a Hib infection.

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How can Hib be prevented?

The best way to prevent Hib infection is vaccination. The Hib vaccine is part of [Ontario's Routine Immunization Schedule](#) and is typically given as a combination vaccine that also includes vaccines against diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (whooping cough) and polio. Practising good hygiene and handwashing are also important to stop the spread of infection.

- Wash your hands thoroughly and often for at least 15 seconds
- Cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze
- Properly dispose of dirty tissues
- 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 home