

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

Haemophilus influenzae type b is a bacteria that can cause a variety of different kinds of infections (for example, ear infections, sinus infections, pneumonia, blood stream infections, and infections of the covering of the spinal cord and brain). Before the introduction of an effective Hib vaccine in the late 1980's, Hib was the leading cause of bacterial meningitis (inflammation of the coverings of the spinal cord and brain) and other invasive bacterial diseases (for example, blood stream infections, pneumonia, and joint infections) among children less than 5 years of age.

Who gets Hib disease?

Hib disease can occur in any age group. Due to widespread use of Hib vaccine in children, very few cases of Hib in children are reported each year in Ohio. Hib is diagnosed more often in the elderly, in people who are immunocompromised and in incompletely or unvaccinated children.

How is Hib disease spread?

Hib disease may be transmitted through contact with mucus or droplets from the nose and throat of an infected person.

What are the symptoms of Hib disease?

The symptoms depend on the location of the infection. For example, if an individual has Hib meningitis, the symptoms may include fever, lethargy, vomiting and a stiff neck.

How soon do symptoms appear?

The incubation period for Hib disease is unknown, but is probably less than one week.

When and for how long is a person able to spread Hib disease?

The contagious period varies. As long as the Hib organisms are present in an individual's nose and throat, that individual can spread the Hib bacteria to other persons (even if the individual does not have symptoms). If the individual is treated with antibiotics, though, the spread of Hib will stop 24 to 48 hours after the antibiotics were started.

Does past infection with Hib disease make a person immune?

Children who had Hib disease before 24 months of age may be at risk of getting Hib disease again. Children and adults who had Hib disease at 24 months of age or older are likely to be immune.

What is the treatment for Hib disease?

Antibiotics are used to treat Hib infections. Sometimes individuals exposed to a person with

a Hib infection will be given antibiotics to prevent them from becoming infected with the Hib bacteria. (This is called antibiotic prophylaxis.)

What are the possible complications associated with Hib disease?

A certain proportion of individuals who get Hib meningitis suffer long-lasting neurologic problems, including deafness. Despite antibiotics, 2% to 5% of individuals who develop Hib meningitis die.

What can be done to prevent the spread of Hib disease?

All children should be immunized with an approved Hib vaccine beginning at two months of age. There are currently several Hib vaccines licensed by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Recommendations for scheduling of subsequent doses of Hib vaccine vary depending on the manufacturer of the vaccine. Thus, it is important to consult your physician or local health department about this. In addition, occasionally individuals who have had contact with a person with a Hib infection will need antibiotics to prevent them from developing Hib disease.