

# IDRS Infectious Disease Reporting System

Disease Reporting 24 Hours a Day

Columbus Public Health and Franklin County Public Health

## HAEMOPHILUS INFLUENZAE SEROTYPE B (HIB)

*Haemophilus influenzae type B* (Hib) is a bacterium that can cause a variety of infections (ear infections, sinus infections, pneumonia, blood stream infections). 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 serious bacterial infections in children less than 5 years of age.

### Symptoms

- The incubation period for Hib disease is unknown, but is probably less than one week.
- The symptoms depend on the location of the infection. For example, if an individual has Hib meningitis, the symptoms may include fever, tiredness, vomiting and a stiff neck. More than half of Hib cases in the United States are meningitis.
- Symptoms of other types of infection:
  - Fever
  - Cough or pneumonia
  - Skin infections (especially on the face)
  - Arthritis or joint pain
  - Difficulty swallowing or breathing (this is an emergency)

### Transmission

- Hib disease may be transmitted through contact with mucus or droplets from the nose and throat of an infected person. This may be through the air or on objects (a used Kleenex tissue, sharing cups).
- Due to widespread use of Hib vaccine in children, Ohio has very few cases of Hib in children. Hib is diagnosed more often in the elderly, people with immune system problems, and unvaccinated children.
- People can spread Hib as long as the bacteria are present in the nose and throat, even without symptoms. If the individual is treated, the spread of Hib will stop 24 to 48 hours after starting antibiotics.

### Treatment

- Infections caused by Hib are very serious and usually require hospitalization. Patients usually receive antibiotics through an IV. Despite antibiotics, some people who develop Hib meningitis die.
- In households with unimmunized children under 4 years of age, all everyone in the household should receive medication to prevent infection. Medication is not needed if all contacts are older than 4 years.

### Prevention

- Fortunately, there is a vaccine available against Hib that will prevent children from getting invasive disease. Children should receive a total of 4 doses of this vaccine during their first 2 years of life.
- Frequent hand hygiene is always the best defense. This includes washing hands for at least 15-20 seconds (sing the happy birthday song twice). Don't share cups, utensils, and personal items.

### Additional Information

This bacterium does NOT cause influenza. During the influenza pandemic of 1889-92, Hib was found in patients who died and was mistakenly claimed to be the cause of influenza, so it was named *Haemophilus influenzae*. The actual cause of the influenza epidemic, the influenza virus, was not discovered until much later.

**All information is general in nature and is not intended to be used as a substitute for appropriate professional advice.**



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