



Haemophilus Influenzae Type b

The Disease

You may never have heard of *Haemophilus Influenzae* type b, or "Hib" disease. Hib disease has never been as well known as other childhood diseases, but it is just as dangerous. As recently as the mid-1980's, Hib disease struck one child out of 200 under 5 years old in the United States. Every year about 12,000 children got meningitis (inflammation of the covering of the brain) as a result of Hib. In fact, Hib disease was the leading cause of bacterial meningitis in children under five. About 1 in 4 of these children suffered permanent brain damage, and about 1 in 20 died. In addition, about 8,000 children a year suffered from other serious complications, such as pneumonia.

The Immunization

Hib vaccine has had a dramatic impact on *Haemophilus Influenzae* type b. As soon as the first vaccine came into use in 1985, the disease began to disappear. Several improved vaccines have been licensed since then, and the age for the first shot has been lowered from 24 months to 2 months. There were an estimated 20,000 cases of Hib disease a year in the mid-1980's, but now there are only a few hundred cases a year.

What you need to know about Hib

- Hib (Haemophilus Influenzae Type b) is a serious disease caused by bacteria. Hib usually infects children younger than 5 years old.
- Hib is spread person-to-person through airborne droplets. Your child can get Hib disease from being around children or adults who have the bacteria in their nose or throat. These people may or may not appear sick.
- Hib can cause meningitis (infection of the brain and spinal cord). This can lead to permanent deafness and brain damage. Hib infection can also cause pneumonia, blood infections, and severe swelling in the throat that can block breathing and lead to death.
- Hib is common throughout the world. Each year, Hib sickens millions of children worldwide and kills more than 300,000. The number of children infected by Hib has greatly declined in the U.S. because of vaccination, but an unvaccinated child can still get infected.
- Vaccination is the most effective step you can take to be protected from this serious disease.

You can protect your child from Hib with vaccination. All children should get 3-4 doses of Hib vaccine (depending on the brand), starting at 2 months of age. If your child misses a dose or gets behind in schedule, make sure they get the next dose as soon as possible.

For more information about this subject please check:

The Center for Disease Control at www.cdc.gov/

The American Academy of Pediatrics at www.aap.org