

PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

Hib

Massachusetts Department of Public Health, 305 South Street, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130

What is Hib disease?

Haemophilus influenzae type B (called “Hib”) is a serious disease caused by bacteria. It usually affects young children under the age of 5 years. Hib meningitis can cause permanent brain damage and can cause swelling in the airway and lead to suffocation. Hib can also infect the lungs, blood, joints, bones and the thin membrane that covers the heart. Before Hib vaccine, Hib disease was the leading cause of bacterial meningitis among children.

Hib can also cause less serious illnesses, like bronchitis, sinus infections, and ear infections. The germ can also be carried in the nose and throats of people who feel fine and have no symptoms.

Is Hib disease dangerous?

Yes. Before Hib vaccine, each year about 20,000 children in the United States under 5 years old got severe Hib disease and nearly 1,000 of them died. Since 1988 when Hib vaccine was introduced, Hib disease in infants and young children has decreased by 99% to fewer than 1 case per 100, 000 children younger than 5 years of age.

How is Hib disease spread?

Hib is most likely spread through droplets, by coughing and sneezing. Your child can get Hib disease by being around other children or adults who may have the bacteria in their throats and not know it. The germs are spread from person to person. If the germs stay in the nose and throat, children probably won't get sick. But sometimes the germs spread into a child's lungs or bloodstream and then Hib can cause serious disease.

Who gets Hib disease?

Currently, Hib disease occurs primarily in infants who are not fully immunized and almost half of all Hib cases occur in children under 6 months of age. Children and adults with sickle cell anemia, no spleen, weakened immune systems or who are on drugs or treatments that weaken the immune system, also are at higher risk for Hib.

In the past, Black, Hispanic, Alaska Native, Native American and poor children were at higher risk of getting Hib. Children younger than 6 years old who attended day care or lived in crowded conditions seemed to be at higher risk, too.

How can you prevent Hib disease?

Protect your children by having them vaccinated. All infants should get a series of four Hib shots starting when they are 2 months old. The rest of the shots are given at 4 months, 6 months and 15 months. There are different schedules for babies between 7 and 15 months old who missed the shots when they were younger. Children 15 months through 4 years of age need at least 1 dose. Children 5 years of age and older and adults with the special health problems described above also need at least 1 dose.

Is the Hib vaccine safe?

Yes. It is safe for most people, but like any vaccine it can sometimes cause mild side effects. About one of every 4 children who get Hib vaccine will have a little redness or swelling where the shot was given.

These reactions are not serious and usually go away in a few days. More severe reactions can happen, but they are rare.

Who should not get Hib vaccine?

- People who have ever had a serious reaction to a previous dose of Hib vaccine.
- Children less than 6 weeks of age.
- People who are moderately or severely ill at the time the shot is scheduled should usually wait until they recover.

Where can I get more information?

- Your doctor, nurse or clinic, or your local board of health (listed in the phone book under local government).
- The Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Immunization Program (617) 983-6800 or toll-free at (888) 658-2850, or on the MDPH website at www.mass.gov/dph/.
- Boston providers and residents may also call the Boston Public Health Commission at (617) 534-5611.
- CDC National Immunization Information Hotline
English: 1-800-232-2522 (Mon – Fri, 8am – 11pm) or
Spanish: 1-800-232-0233 (Mon – Fri, 8am – 11pm)
TTY: 1-800-243-7889 (Mon – Fri, 10am – 10pm)