

Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib)

What is haemophilus influenzae type b?

Haemophilus influenzae type b is a type of germ (bacteria) that can live in the nose and throat. It is also called Hib for short.

Hib very rarely makes people sick but when it does, it can cause serious infections.

What types of infection does Hib cause?

Hib can cause infections of the lungs, top of the airway, the joints and the linings of the brain. These infections can especially affect children younger than five years old.

How does Hib spread?

Hib germs can be passed from person to person in the small droplets people produce when they talk, cough or sneeze.

Who is at risk from Hib?

Most people who come into contact with Hib germs become immune to them. But a small number of people, mainly young children, get Hib disease before they can become immune. 'Immune' means your body knows how to fight off the germ so you don't get sick from it.

It is common for the germ to spread among families and people who live in the same house. It can also spread in places like preschools where there are many young children who may not yet be immune to the disease.

How can you prevent Hib?

The best protection against Hib is vaccination. All babies in New Zealand can be immunised against Hib as part of their free childhood immunisations at 6 weeks, 3 months, 5 months and 15 months old. They are only fully vaccinated when they have had all four doses.

If a child has already had Hib disease, should they still be vaccinated?

Yes, if the child is younger than two years old, they should still be vaccinated. They should wait for four weeks after they have recovered from their Hib infection before being immunised.

What are the symptoms of Hib?

Hib can cause several diseases that can have different symptoms. But the most important signs to look for in children are high fever and looking very unwell. Other important signs can include:

Infected area	Signs to look for
Linings of the brain (meningitis)	Drowsiness, severe headache, vomiting, seizure, loss of appetite, neck stiffness, sensitivity to bright light.
Joints	A swollen joint, inability to walk.
Top of airway	Noisy and difficult breathing and/or swallowing, drooling.

What should you do if you think your child has Hib?

If a child gets sick after being close to someone diagnosed with Hib disease, immediately take them to your doctor. **Take this fact sheet with you and tell the doctor your child has been near someone with Hib.** You can also call Healthline for advice on 0800 611 116. Healthline is a free, 24/7 service with interpreters available.

More information:

- Ministry of Health**
<https://www.health.govt.nz/your-health/conditions-and-treatments/diseases-and-illnesses/haemophilus-influenzae-type-b-hib#>
- Immunisation Advisory Centre**
<https://www.immune.org.nz/diseases/haemophilus-influenzae-type-b>
- Healthline**
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