

Hib (*Haemophilus influenzae* type b)

Despite its name, the germ that causes this infection is not related to influenza ('the flu'). Until a vaccine was introduced in 1993, Hib was one of the most common causes of life-threatening bacterial infections in Australian children under 5 years old.

Hib can cause swelling in the throat, which interferes with breathing, causing noises when breathing. It may block breathing altogether. It can also cause pneumonia (infection in the lungs) and infect the membranes covering the brain (meningitis), the joints, or the tissue under the skin (usually on the face).

Symptoms of Hib meningitis are very similar to other types of meningitis. These include severe headache, stiff neck, fits, severe sleepiness, difficulty waking up and loss of consciousness.

How it spreads

Hib spreads from person to person via droplets in the air that contain the germ. People get infected by:

- breathing in droplets when an infected person breathes, coughs or sneezes on them
- touching a surface contaminated with droplets – for example, hands, tissues, toys or eating utensils – and then touching their mouth.

Vaccination against Hib is part of the routine childhood vaccination schedule in the Australian National Immunisation Program.

Exclusion period

Exclude until the person has taken antibiotics for at least 4 days.

Actions for educators and other staff

Follow the exclusion period in the *Staying healthy* guidelines.

Contact your local public health unit for advice if you have a case of Hib in your service. In New South Wales and the Northern Territory, education and care services must notify their local public health unit about any cases of Hib in the service.

Check the immunisation records of all children who have come into contact with a child with Hib. Unvaccinated children who have had close contact with the infected child will need special antibiotics.

Ensure staff and children have good hand and respiratory hygiene.

Ensure staff use appropriate cleaning practices, as described in the *Staying healthy* guidelines.

Actions for parents and carers

Ensure your baby is vaccinated against Hib by keeping their childhood immunisations up to date.

If your child has symptoms of Hib, contact your doctor immediately so they can give your child the correct treatment.

Keep your child at home until they feel well and have completed the course of antibiotics prescribed.

Teach them to cough or sneeze into a tissue, then throw the tissue into a bin and wash their hands. If there are no tissues nearby, teach them to cough or sneeze into their inner elbow instead of their hands.

Make sure your child washes their hands thoroughly and often.

More information about Hib

See healthdirect for more information on prevention, diagnosis and treatment of Hib (healthdirect.gov.au/haemophilus-influenzae-type-b-hib).

To find out if a child needs medical help:

- use the online symptom checker (healthdirect.gov.au/symptom-checker)
- speak to a registered nurse by calling the 24-hour health advice hotline on 1800 022 222.