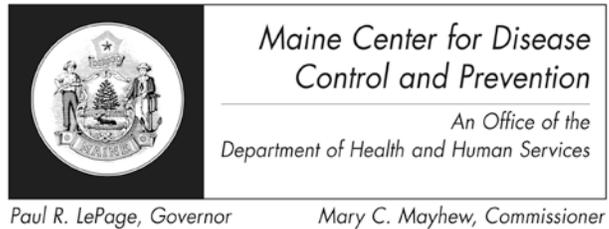


Haemophilus influenzae

Disease

Fact Sheet



What is *Haemophilus influenzae* disease?

Haemophilus influenzae disease (sometimes called H. flu), is caused by the *Haemophilus influenzae* bacteria. A particular kind of *Haemophilus influenzae* called serotype B (Hib), was once the most common cause of bacterial infection in children. But, due to widespread use of Hib vaccine in children, few cases are reported each year. Non-serotype B infections occur primarily among the elderly and adults with weak immune systems. There are no vaccines for use against non-serotype B disease.

How is it spread?

The bacteria spread from person to person through airborne droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes. A person can have the bacteria in their nose and throat and never get sick, but they can pass the germs on to someone else. If the bacteria spread into the lungs or bloodstream, they can cause serious illness.

What are the symptoms of *Haemophilus influenzae* disease?

Haemophilus influenzae causes many kinds of illnesses including:

- meningitis (inflammation of the coverings of the spinal column and brain)
- bacteremia (infection of the blood)
- pneumonia (infection of the lungs), and
- septic arthritis (infection of the joints).

Who is at highest risk?

The elderly and adults with underlying disease are at greatest risk of non-serotype B disease. Hib disease occurs primarily in infants who are not fully immunized and is most common in those 6 – 18 months of age. Children and adults with weakened immune systems and unvaccinated household and daycare contacts of known Hib cases are also at higher risk for Hib.

How is it diagnosed?

Haemophilus influenzae disease is diagnosed when the bacteria are grown from the blood, cerebral spinal fluid (CSF) or other sterile site of an infected person.

How is it treated?

Serious infections are treated with antibiotics.

Do contacts of someone diagnosed with *Haemophilus influenzae* disease need to be treated?

Treatment with antibiotics is recommended for all household members of someone diagnosed with Hib disease only if there is at least one unvaccinated child under 4 years of age or a child or adult with a weak immune system living in the home. Preventive treatment for non-vaccinated daycare center contacts of known Hib cases may also be recommended.

How can *Haemophilus influenzae* disease be prevented?

The best way to protect against Hib disease is by getting vaccinated.

Is the Hib vaccine safe?

Yes, 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 get the Hib vaccine?

- All infants should get a series of four Hib shots starting when they are 2 months old.
- Children 15 months through 4 years of age need at least one dose.
- Children and adults with other health problems such as sickle cell disease, damaged or no spleen and weak immune systems should get at least one dose of the vaccine.

Who should *not* get Hib vaccine?

People who have ever had a serious reaction to a previous dose of Hib vaccine and children less than 6 weeks of age should *not* get Hib vaccine.

People who are moderately or severely ill at the time the shot is scheduled should usually wait until they recover.

***Haemophilus influenzae* disease in Maine**

Typically, between 2 and 25 cases of *Haemophilus influenzae* are reported in Maine each year. For specific information on the number of *Haemophilus influenzae* cases reported in Maine, please visit the Maine CDC website: <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/boh/newpubs.htm> and refer to the Infectious Epidemiology Program Documents.

Where can I get more information?

For more information contact your healthcare provider or local health center. You can also contact the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention by calling 1-800-821-5821. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website - <http://www.cdc.gov> - is another excellent source of health information.