
Immunization - Infant Haemophilus influenzae type B (Hib) Vaccine

This fact sheet provides basic information only. It must not take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always talk to a health care professional about any health concerns you have, and before you make any changes to your diet, lifestyle or treatment.

Vaccines (injections or shots) are the best way to protect against some very serious infections. The Canadian Paediatric Society and the National Advisory Committee on Immunization strongly recommend routine immunization. Infant Hib vaccine protects children from serious diseases like meningitis caused by the Haemophilus influenzae type b or Hib germ. It is recommended for use in infants and children younger than five years. Hib vaccine is usually given in combination with diphtheria, tetanus, acellular pertussis, and inactivated poliovirus (DTaP-IPV) vaccine, but may be given alone.

What is Haemophilus influenzae type B (Hib) disease?

Even though "influenzae" is part of its name, the Hib germ does not cause influenza or the flu. Before the Hib vaccine was used, the Hib germ was a common cause of serious infections in children. Hib was the most common cause of bacterial meningitis in children two months to five years of age. Meningitis is a serious infection of the fluid and lining that covers the spinal cord. Meningitis can cause brain damage, learning and developmental problems, deafness and blindness. The Hib germ also causes a serious infection of the throat near the voice box. This infection is called epiglottitis. This can make it difficult for the child to breathe. The Hib germ can also cause infection of the lungs (pneumonia) and bone and joint infections.

Children under five years are more likely to get Hib disease. Children attending childcare centres are even more likely to catch it. The Hib germ spreads to others through coughing and sneezing.

How well does the Hib vaccine protect my child?

The vaccine protects around 95 per cent of children who get all their shots against serious Hib infections. It will not prevent meningitis caused by other germs.

At what age should my child be vaccinated with the Hib vaccine?

Your child should have the first shot at two months of age. Three more shots are needed - at four months, six months and 18 months of age. This vaccine is usually given to infants and children in combination with the DTaP-IPV (diphtheria, tetanus, acellular pertussis, polio) vaccine. It is not usually given on its own.

What if my child misses a shot?

Your child should get the next shot as soon as possible. If your child did not get the first shot at two months of age, your doctor/nurse practitioner will recommend a special "catch-up" schedule.

Children between 15 months and five years of age who have never been vaccinated will need only one shot of the Hib vaccine and then additional

doses of DTaP-IPV vaccine. Your doctor/nurse practitioner will advise you about the required shots.

Is the Hib vaccine safe?

Yes. Some children may have mild pain, swelling and redness for a few days at the spot where the shot was given. Very few children may get a mild fever, rash or hives. You should always discuss the benefits and risks of any vaccine with your doctor/nurse practitioner.

When should I call my doctor/nurse practitioner?

Call your doctor/nurse practitioner or go to the nearest hospital emergency department if your child has any of the following within 3 days of getting the shot:

- high fever (over 40 C or 104 F);
- convulsions or seizures;
- very pale colour and serious drowsiness;
- hives;
- swelling of the face or mouth;
- trouble breathing;
- other serious problems.

Who should not get the Hib vaccine?

The doctor/nurse practitioner may decide not to give your child's shot if your child has:

- a high fever or serious infection worse than a cold;
- a serious allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to this vaccine;
- a severe allergy to any component of the vaccine.

Who should I talk to if I have any more questions about the Hib vaccine?

Talk to your doctor/nurse practitioner or call your local public health unit for more information.

Your record of protection

After any immunization, make sure your child's immunization record (i.e., the "yellow card") is updated. If your child is attending child care or school, inform your local public health unit each time your child receives an immunization. An immunization record is required for child care and school attendance and for certain types of travel and work, so keep it in a safe place.