

## The Hib Vaccine and Hib Infection

What is the Hib vaccine?

It prevents diseases caused by *Haemophilus influenzae* type b (Hib) bacteria. Infection with the Hib bacteria may cause potentially fatal bacterial meningitis or severe epiglottitis. The Hib vaccine is already included in routine immunization schedules in more than 100 countries.

What are Hib bacteria?

While Hib is an abbreviation for *Haemophilus influenzae* type b, Hib bacteria do not cause influenza. (They are named so because during the 1800s they were mistakenly thought to be the cause of influenza.) Hib are common bacteria that reside in the nose and throat. They cause a runny nose, cough, epiglottitis and acute otitis media. Furthermore, if they enter the bloodstream, they may cause more serious diseases such as sepsis, bacterial meningitis and pneumonia. Most of us acquire immunity against Hib by the age of 5 years and rarely develop any severe illnesses caused by Hib bacteria after this.

Prevention of bacterial meningitis

About 600 infants and young children develop Hib meningitis every year in Japan.

Almost all serious Hib infections have disappeared in countries that have introduced Hib vaccination.

What is the epiglottitis?

The epiglottis is a flap of “skin” attached to the larynx that closes the airway when one eats and drinks. Epiglottitis is a swelling of the epiglottis mostly due to bacterial infection with Hib. While adults may also be affected, it mostly affects young children aged 2-5 years. Patients complain of a high fever, sore throat, salivation due to swallowing difficulties, and wheezing with breathing difficulties. If the swelling is severe enough to cause obstruction, intubation may be necessary to keep the airway open.

Treatment for Hib infection

Hib meningitis progresses rapidly and can be fatal. Each year in Japan there are around 30 deaths from the disease and over 100 patients suffer from serious after-effects such as permanent hearing damage or developmental disorders. Antibiotics often have a limited effect due to increasing drug resistance.

Remember prevention is better than cure!

Get your child vaccinated!