

Haemophilus influenzae Fact Sheet

What is *Haemophilus influenzae*?

Haemophilus influenzae (*H. influenzae*) are a type of bacteria that live in people's nose and throat and usually cause no harm. However, the bacteria can sometimes move to other parts of the body and cause infection. These infections range from mild, like ear infections, to serious. Doctors consider some *H. influenzae* infections "invasive." Invasive disease happens when the bacteria invade parts of the body that are normally free from germs. For example, *H. influenzae* can invade the fluid around the spine and brain, causing meningitis, or bloodstream, causing bacteremia. Invasive disease is usually serious, requiring treatment in a hospital, and can sometimes result in death.

Does *H. influenzae* cause influenza?

Despite its name, *H. influenzae* does not cause the flu (influenza).

What are symptoms of *H. influenzae* infection?

H. influenzae can cause many different [kinds of infections](#). Symptoms depend on the part of the body that is infected but may include fever and chills, headache, excessive tiredness, nausea, vomiting, stiff neck, difficulty breathing, and/or confusion. Anyone with severe symptoms or a rapidly worsening illness should be promptly evaluated by a health care provider and the illness should be reported to the school and local health department.

How is *H. influenzae* spread?

People spread *H. influenzae* to others through respiratory droplets. People who are infected spread the bacteria by coughing or sneezing, which creates small respiratory droplets that contain the bacteria. Other people can get sick if they breathe in those droplets. People who are not sick but have the bacteria in their noses and throats can still spread the bacteria. That is how *H. influenzae* spreads most of the time. The bacteria can also spread to people who have close or lengthy contact with a person with *H. influenzae* disease.

Who is more likely to develop invasive *H. influenzae* disease?

H. influenzae disease occurs mostly in children younger than 5 years old and adults 65 years or older. American Indian people, Alaska Native people, and people with certain medical conditions (including sickle cell disease, people without a functional spleen, HIV, or a weakened immune system) are also at increased risk of developing invasive disease.

Is there a vaccine against *H. influenzae*?

There are 6 distinct types of *H. influenzae* (named a through f), as well as other *H. influenzae* that are classified as nontypeable. Vaccines can prevent *H. influenzae* type b (Hib) disease. However, the Hib vaccine does not prevent disease caused by the other types of *H. influenzae*. [Hib vaccine](#) is one of the recommended routine childhood vaccinations in the United States.

What can I do to protect myself?

Take the following measures to help protect yourself and your community from *H. influenzae* and other currently circulating germs.

- Stay up to date with all recommended vaccines.
- Wash your hands often.
- Wear a mask.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Then wash your hands.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick.

Additional information about *H. influenzae* disease from the CDC can be found at: www.cdc.gov/hidisease/about/causes-transmission.html