

## HIB DISEASE FACT SHEET

### What is Hib disease?

Hib is the shortened name for a germ called Haemophilus influenzae type b. Hib can cause serious infections including meningitis (infection of the linings around the brain), epiglottitis (infection at the top of the airway), septic arthritis (infection of a joint), and pneumonia (lung infection), particularly in children aged under 5 years.

### How is Hib spread?

Hib germs are commonly carried in the back of the nose and throat but only very rarely cause illness. The germs are passed from person to person in secretions, especially the small droplets everyone produces with coughing and sneezing. Spread commonly occurs within families living in the same house and there could be a risk of spread in pre-school institutions.

Most people who come into contact with Hib germs become immune to them. However, a small number of people, particularly young children, develop severe Hib disease before they can become immune.

### What is the disease like?

As Hib causes several diseases, there are a number of different features. Overall, the most important signs of these diseases in children are high fever and looking very unwell. Other important signs that might suggest particular Hib diseases are:

- **Meningitis** may cause drowsiness; severe headache; convulsion, vomiting
- **Septic arthritis** may cause a swollen joint; inability to walk
- **Epiglottitis** may cause noisy and difficult breathing

If a child has had close contact with a person with diagnosed Hib disease and becomes unwell, the child should be taken to a doctor as soon as possible. Tell the doctor about the Hib contact, and **take these sheets of paper with you.**

**It is recommended that all children under five years of age are vaccinated against Hib in New Zealand. Vaccination is available *free* from general practitioners**