

Vaccination Against Hib is Essential First Line of Defense Against Devastating Disease

As recently as a quarter of a century ago, as many as 25,000 Americans – mostly under the age of 5 – suffered from a devastating disease known as *Haemophilus influenzae* type b, known more simply as Hib. But today, fewer than 100 cases are reported each year. A public health success story? Yes. But despite the success of this vaccination in the U.S., Hib disease remains a threat. Health experts warn that unless high vaccination rates are maintained, Hib disease could make a comeback.

“The dramatic reduction in Hib disease in this country is yet another example of a successful vaccination program,” said Mary Beth Petraco MS, RN, CS, CPNP of NAPNAP. “Hib has been reduced by 99 percent since the early 1980s, and the medical community looks forward to seeing that number one day increase to 100 percent.

Before the vaccine conjugate became available in 1987, Hib disease was the leading cause of bacterial meningitis (an infection of the fluid in the spinal cord that can lead to brain damage) and other serious diseases among children younger than 5 years of age in the U.S. Hib disease remains a public health concern in the U.S. and other countries due to the continued existence of the disease in the adult population and community. Early prevention of Hib disease through immunization remains the first line of defense against the disease and its circulation.

Hib disease is contagious and can be spread from person to person. There are a number of types of Hib bacteria. Type b is the cause for 95 percent of cases. It usually appears as an infection surrounding the tissues of the spinal cord and brain and includes symptoms such as fever, decreased mental concentration and stiff neck. In some instances, mild to severe cases of pneumonia may follow Hib. This disease can also cause infection in the skin and joints as well as produce swelling of the tissue in the throat. Close contact with an infected person in the household or daycare, for example, can lead to outbreaks or additional spread of the disease, especially to an unprotected child. If you are not sure whether or not your child is protected against this disease, talk to your health care provider.

Prevention Against Hib

A vaccine is available to prevent against Hib infection. Based on the immunization recommendations from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, infants receive a series four vaccines at 2, 4, 6 and 12-15 months of age.

To learn more about Hib disease, contact your health care provider or visit Hibdisease.com.