Haemophilus Influenzae Type B
Hib disease

What is Haemophilus influenzae type B (Hib)?
Hib are bacteria that may cause various types of diseases including blood infection (sepsis) and meningitis (swelling of the tissues that cover the brain and spinal cord).

How common is Hib disease?
Since the Hib vaccine became available in 1988, Hib cases have declined by 99 percent in infants and young children. Before use of the Hib vaccine, Hib was the most common cause of bacterial meningitis in children younger than 5 years. During the early 1980s, about 20,000 people became ill with Hib each year in the United States.

Who gets Hib disease?
Anyone can get Hib disease, but it is most common in children between the ages of 3 months and 3 years. The elderly and people with weakened immune systems are also at a higher risk of becoming sick.

How is Hib spread?
Hib bacteria are spread by direct contact with the respiratory and oral secretions (saliva, sputum or nasal mucus) of an infected person with or without symptoms. Usually the Hib bacteria remain in the nose and throat without causing any harm. Sometimes the Hib bacteria can enter the blood and spread, causing serious disease.

What are the symptoms of Hib disease?
Hib disease can range from mild illness (e.g., sinus, ear and skin infections) to serious illnesses, such as meningitis, pneumonia (lung infection), epiglottitis (swelling of the upper airway) and blood infections.

How soon do the symptoms of Hib disease appear?
The time between exposure and the beginning of disease is unknown, but is probably short (two to four days).

Does past infection with Hib make a person immune?
Children who have Hib disease before 24 months of age may not develop immunity and should still receive the Hib vaccine to be protected from getting Hib disease in the future. If Hib infection occurs in a child after 24 months of age, the child generally develops future immunity to Hib and vaccination is not necessary.

What is the treatment for Hib disease?
Hib infections are treated with antibiotics. Patients are no longer contagious 24-48 hours after receiving effective antibiotics.

What can be done to prevent the spread of Hib?
All children should be immunized with Hib conjugate vaccine beginning at 2 months of age. Depending on age and vaccination history, close contacts of a person infected with Hib may require immediate preventive antibiotics.