

## HAEMOPHILUS INFLUENZAE, INVASIVE DISEASE: Notes about the Disease

Historically, *Haemophilus influenzae* type serotype b (Hib) was the most common cause of bacterial meningitis. Hib was also a common cause of other serious illnesses, including bacteremia, epiglottitis, and pneumonia. Fortunately, Hib meningitis and other invasive Hib infections have become very rare in the United States since the introduction of Hib vaccine into the routine childhood immunization series.

Although Hib is by far the most pathogenic serotype of *Haemophilus influenzae* (or H. flu), other strains are also capable of causing infection. The serotypes are labeled a through f depending on the capsule composition. Strains that don't produce a capsule are referred to as non-typeable.

H. flu is often part of the normal respiratory flora, and non-typeable strains can be found in the nose and throat of up to 80% of the population.<sup>1</sup> It is transmitted from person to person by respiratory droplets. H. flu is not carried by animals and does not persist for long in the environment. Carriage of Hib has dramatically decreased due to vaccination.

For most people, colonization with non-Hib serotypes does not cause any problem. However, all serotypes and non-typeable strains are capable of causing mucosal infections such as otitis, sinusitis, and conjunctivitis as well as invasive disease (most commonly bacteremia and pneumonia).

Although secondary cases are uncommon when compared to *Neisseria meningitidis*, surveillance for invasive H. flu remains important since clusters and outbreaks of invasive Hib disease can occur, and the tools for prevention are available.

1. JI Ward, "Haemophilus influenzae," in *Textbook of Pediatric Infectious Diseases*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., ed. Long, Pickering, and Prober (Saunders, Philadelphia).