Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib) immunisation

Summary

- Hib bacteria can lead to serious illness and death, especially in children under five.
- Immunisation is the best protection against Hib bacteria.
- The National Immunisation Program provides a combination vaccine with Hib protection at 2, 4 and 6 months of age and the fourth dose of Hib vaccine at 18 months of age.

The National Immunisation Program provides children with free immunisation against Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib). The first three doses of Hib vaccine are given at two, four and six months in a combination vaccine against diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, hepatitis B, polio and Hib. The fourth booster dose of Hib vaccine is given at 18 months of age.

Overview of Hib

Before the introduction of immunisation in 1993, Hib was the most frequent cause of life-threatening infection in children under five years of age. Hib causes conditions such as meningitis (inflammation of the membranes covering the brain), epiglottitis (inflammation of the flap and the top of the windpipe) and pneumonia. These conditions can develop quickly and lead to death.

The disease caused by Hib is spread mainly through coughing or sneezing, or contact with secretions from the nose and throat of an infected person. Despite its name, Hib is a bacterium and is not a form of influenza (flu), which is caused by a virus. Immunisation is the best way to reduce the risk of infection in young children.

Hib immunisation

Hib immunisation requires several doses of the vaccine to get good protection. The first three doses of Hib vaccine are given to children at two, four and six months in a combination vaccine against diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, hepatitis B, polio and Hib.

The fourth booster dose of Hib vaccine is given at 18 months.

All of these immunisations are free of charge under the National Immunisation Program Schedule.

Pre-immunisation checklist

Before immunisation, tell your doctor or nurse if your child:

- Is unwell on the day of immunisation (has a temperature over 38.5°C)
- Has ever had a serious reaction to any vaccine
- Has had a serious reaction to any component of the vaccine
- Has had a severe allergy to anything

Side effects of the Hib vaccine

Vaccines against Hib bacteria are effective and safe, although all medications can have unwanted side effects.

Side effects from these vaccines are uncommon and are usually mild, but may include:

- Localised pain, redness and swelling at the injection site
- Occasionally, an injection-site lump (nodule) that may last many weeks, but treatment is not needed
- Low-grade temperature (fever)
- Loss of appetite

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• Children can be unsettled, irritable, may cry, or be generally unhappy, drowsy and tired.

Managing fever after immunisation

Common side effects following immunisation are usually mild and temporary (occurring in the first few days after immunisation). Specific treatment is not usually required.

There are a number of treatment options that can reduce the side effects of the vaccine including:

• Drinking extra fluids and not overdressing if there is a fever
• Although routine use of paracetamol after vaccination is not recommended, if fever is present, paracetamol can be given – check the label for the correct dose or speak with your pharmacist, (especially when giving paracetamol to children).

Managing injection site discomfort

Many vaccine injections may result in soreness, redness, itching, swelling or burning at the injection site for one to two days. Paracetamol might be required to ease the discomfort.

Concerns about side effects

If the side effect following immunisation is unexpected, persistent or severe, or if you are worried about yourself or your child's condition after a vaccination, see your doctor or immunisation nurse as soon as possible or go directly to a hospital. Immunisation side effects may be reported to SAEFVIC, the Victorian vaccine safety and central reporting service.

You can discuss with your immunisation provider how to report adverse events in other states or territories. It is also important to seek medical advice if you (or your child) are unwell, as this may be due to other illness, rather than because of the vaccination.

Rare side effects

There is a very small risk of a serious allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to any vaccine. This is why you are advised to stay at the clinic or medical surgery for at least 15 minutes following immunisation, in case further treatment is required. If any other reactions are severe and persistent, or if you are worried, contact your doctor for further information.

Immunisation and HALO

The immunisations you may need are decided by your health, age, lifestyle and occupation. Together, these factors are referred to as HALO.

Talk to your doctor or immunisation provider if you think you or someone in your care has health, age, lifestyle or occupation factors that could mean immunisation is necessary. You can check your immunisation HALO using the downloadable poster (pdf).

Where to get help

• Your doctor
• In an emergency, always call triple zero (000)
• Emergency department of your nearest hospital
• Your local government immunisation service
• Maternal and Child Health Line (24 hours) Tel. 132 229
• NURSE-ON-CALL Tel. 1300 60 60 24 – for expert health information and advice (24 hours, 7 days)
• Immunisation Section, Department of Health and Human Services, Victorian Government Tel. 1300 882 008
• National Immunisation Information Line Tel. 1800 671 811
• Your local pharmacist
• SAEFVIC Tel. the Victorian vaccine safety service Tel. 1300 882 924 #1

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