



***Haemophilus influenzae* Disease**

Definition:

Haemophilus influenzae (H. flu) is a bacterium that can cause severe infections, occurring mostly in infants and children younger than five years of age. There are six identifiable types of H. flu (a through f) and other non-identifiable types (called nontypeable). Invasive disease is caused when H. flu bacteria infect sterile body sites.

Signs and symptoms:

H. flu can cause various types of infections in multiple sites in the body, including the lungs, blood, spinal cord, epiglottis, and joints. Symptoms may include a high fever, chills, cough, shortness of breath, earaches, malaise, stiff neck, headache, and mental confusion. Symptoms may be severe enough to require hospitalization. Young children, infants, the elderly, and those with weakened immune systems are at higher risk of becoming ill.

Transmission:

H. flu spreads from person to person by sneezing, coughing, or contact with respiratory droplets. Persons without symptoms can be carriers of the bacteria.

Diagnosis:

Haemophilus influenzae disease is diagnosed by clinical symptoms and laboratory tests. Isolation of the bacteria from a sterile site is needed for confirmation of an invasive infection.

Role of the School Nurse:

Prevention

- Only one type of *Haemophilus influenzae*, type b, is vaccine preventable. *Haemophilus influenzae b* vaccine (Hib) is recommended for infants and children under 5 years of age, starting at 2 months of age. It is a four dose series, with the entire series completed by 18 months of age.
- Encourage frequent handwashing and good cough etiquette.

Treatment Recommendations

- If symptoms are noted, the child should see a provider for testing and treatment.
- Antibiotic treatment is available; however, children with severe illness may need to be hospitalized for treatment.

Exclusions

- Children who are sick should remain at home and see a provider if the disease is suspected.
- Educational modifications may be warranted in children with a positive diagnosis.

Reporting Requirements

- Invasive *Haemophilus influenzae* is reportable within 48 hours of recognition or strong suspicion of illness.

Resources:

- Maine CDC *Haemophilus influenzae* website (including fact sheet): <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/infectious-disease/epi/airborne/haemophilus.shtml>
- Federal CDC *Haemophilus influenzae* website: <http://www.cdc.gov/hi-disease/index.html>

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- **Maine Immunization Program:**
<http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/infectious-disease/immunization/index.shtml>