

# The Hib success story

**M**any people may not know that a new vaccine has been quietly saving children's lives since 1993.

Since being introduced to the Australian childhood immunisation schedule, the Hib vaccine has had spectacular success in reducing this serious childhood disease.

Before 1993, the disease caused by the Hib bacteria was the most frequent life threatening infection in children younger than five years. Children less than two years of age were most at risk.

The full name for the Hib bacteria is *Haemophilus influenzae* type b, but it is not related to influenza (the flu) in any way.

## Before Hib vaccine

Every year in Australia:

- Hib disease affected more than 500 children.
- Between 10 and 15 children died of the disease.
- Another 20-40 children were left with permanent damage to their nervous system or brain.

## How serious is Hib disease?

Hib disease can cause many serious complications:

- *Infection of the membranes around the brain (meningitis).*
- *Swelling of the throat, which can block breathing (epiglottitis).*
- *Pneumonia.*
- *Joint infection.*
- *Infection of the tissue under the skin, usually of the face (cellulitis).*

Both meningitis and epiglottitis can develop rapidly. If they are left

untreated, they can cause death within 24 hours.

## The situation today

We can now prevent diseases caused by Hib. With the introduction of Hib vaccine, the number of children getting severe disease has fallen dramatically. Our doctors are seeing fewer and fewer children with Hib as the number of children being immunised increases. If enough children are immunised, it may even become a disease of the past.

## Is it safe?

The Hib vaccine is safe. No serious reactions to the vaccine have been reported. Some children may have mild swelling and redness at the injection site, but this goes within 24 hours.

Babies need three or four doses of the vaccine, starting at two months of age. The number of doses depends on which type of vaccine is being used, and also the age of the child needing vaccination. Unimmunised children aged 18 months to four years only need one dose.

There are no further boosters after this age because Hib is rarely a problem in older children.

Making sure your child is vaccinated on time means you give your child the best chance of protection against this very serious disease.

*For more information on Hib, talk to your family doctor on your next visit.*

