What We Do: The Center for American Indian Health (CAIH) actively monitors serious diseases caused by the bacteria Streptococcus pneumoniae, Haemophilus influenzae (H. influenzae), Neisseria meningitidis, and Staphylococcus aureus in people living on and around the Navajo and White Mountain Apache (WMA) Tribal lands; and Group A Streptococcus on WMA. Native Americans have higher rates of disease caused by these bacteria. In this issue of the newsletter, we describe trends in H. influenzae disease in children and provide an update on chemoprophylaxis guidelines.

Overview: H. influenzae can cause serious diseases such as pneumonia, meningitis, and ear infections. The bacteria can be encapsulated (types a-f) or unencapsulated (non-typeable). H. influenzae can live in the back of the nose and throat without causing illness (carriage). Transmission occurs through direct contact with respiratory droplets from someone who carries the bacteria or has H. influenzae disease. Native Americans have historically had high rates of invasive H. influenzae disease. Routine use of H. influenzae type b (Hib) vaccine, beginning in 1991, resulted in a reduction in Hib disease by 92% in Native American children in the southwest U.S. However, the rate of Hib disease remains many times higher in Native American children than in the general U.S. (Figure 1). H. influenzae type a (Hia) disease, which has a clinical presentation similar to Hib, now causes a majority of H. influenzae disease. While the rate of Hia disease has been stable in this surveillance system, it is increasing in other indigenous populations.

Control Measures: Secondary cases of Hib disease most often occur in young, unimmunized close contacts, usually in the first week after the index patient is hospitalized. Secondary cases can be prevented by providing rifampin chemoprophylaxis, which reduces the risk of transmission and disease by eliminating H. influenzae in the back of the throat. Given the severity of invasive Hia disease, the high incidence among some communities, including the Navajo Nation, and the concern that secondary cases could occur, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that clinicians consider chemoprophylaxis for close contacts of a person with invasive Hia. Prophylaxis should be initiated as soon as possible; however, secondary cases can occur later, and therefore initiation of prophylaxis ≥7 days after hospitalization of the index patient may still be of benefit. Chemoprophylaxis should be considered for:

- All household contacts when at least one member of the household is aged <4 years or is immunocompromised.
- Preschool or child care center contacts when two or more cases of Hia invasive disease have occurred within 60 days.
- The index patient, if aged <2 years or member of a household with a susceptible contact and treated with a regimen other than cefotaxime or ceftriaxone chemoprophylaxis at the end of therapy for invasive disease.

Disease Investigation: In order to understand reservoirs for transmission and risk factors for H. influenzae disease, CAIH, in collaboration with the Arizona Department of Health Services, the New Mexico Department of Health, and the Navajo Epidemiology Center, is conducting a case-control study of invasive H. influenzae disease on the White Mountain Apache Tribal lands and the Navajo Nation. Enrolled participants provide an oropharyngeal sample and complete a survey. If rifampin is prescribed as chemoprophylaxis, we collect a second swab to assess its effect on H. influenzae carriage.
Many Thanks
to our community partners

Navajo Nation
- Represented by 20+ laboratories
- Navajo Epidemiology Center
- Navajo Area Indian Health Service

White Mountain Apache
- Represented by 3 laboratories
- White Mountain Apache Tribal Council
- Phoenix Area Indian Health Service

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The mission of Johns Hopkins Center for American Indian Health is:
to work in partnership with American Indian and Alaska Native communities to improve the health status, self-sufficiency, and health leadership of Native people. This mission is accomplished through three core activities:

Research Training/Education Service

What bacterial isolates do we look for?

Streptococcus pneumoniae
Haemophilus influenzae
Neisseria meningitidis
Staphylococcus aureus
Group A Streptococcus (WMA only)

Isolated from normally sterile body sites such as:

- Blood
- Cerebrospinal Fluid (CSF)
- Joint Fluid (Synovial Fluid)
- Middle Ear (S. pneumo only)
- Bone
- Pleural Fluid
- Peritoneal Fluid
- Pericardial Fluid
- Amniotic fluid, placenta, wound (Group A Strep. only)

If you have any questions about Active Bacterial Surveillance, please contact us

Center for American Indian Health: Johns Hopkins University
Phone: 410-955-6931
Director of Infectious Disease Prevention Programs: Laura Hammitt, MD
Active Bacterial Surveillance Coordinator: Grace Douglass, MPH

Chinle Field Office
Phone: 928-674-5051
Contact: Jennifer Jaiyeola, MPH

Gallup Field Office
Phone: 505-722-6865
Contact: Carol Tso, RN

Tuba City Field Office
Phone: 928-283-8221
Contact: Kirstin Howell, RN

Fort Defiance Field Office
Phone: 928-729-2435
Contact: Estar Denny, RN

Shiprock/Kayenta Field Office
Phone: 505-368-4030
Contact: Megan Gardner, RN

Whiteriver/Winslow Field Office
Phone: 928-338-9215
Contact: Tally Jones, RN

Please maintain the isolate in your lab until you receive confirmation from us that the isolate was viable.

Photos by Ed Cunicelli

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