

# Pneumococcal Polysaccharide Vaccine

## What is pneumococcal disease?

Pneumococcal disease is a serious illness caused by a bacteria (germ) called *Streptococcus pneumoniae*. People 65 years and older, people with certain health conditions, and babies and young children are at higher risk of getting very sick from pneumococcal disease.

## How is pneumococcal disease spread?

Pneumococcal disease is spread through the air. The bacteria get in the air when someone with the bacteria coughs, sneezes, or even talks. It can also be spread by touching objects that have been coughed or sneezed on by someone with the bacteria.

## How serious is pneumococcal disease?

People can have the pneumococcal bacteria in their nose and throat without getting sick. However, the bacteria can get into other parts of the body and cause serious infections such as meningitis (brain infection), blood infection, or a lung infection (pneumonia)). These serious infections can cause death or long-term problems.

## What are the symptoms of pneumococcal disease?

The symptoms depend on where the infection is in the body. They can include:

- fever
- chest pain
- irritability
- feeling short of breath
- headache
- stiff neck
- feeling tired and weak
- nausea and vomiting
- seizures
- cough
- muscle aches and pains

## How can I prevent pneumococcal disease?

The bacteria are becoming resistant to some of the medicine used to treat it, so preventing the infection is more important than ever.

- **Get the pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine.**

The vaccine protects against 23 types of pneumococcal bacteria. It can help prevent the most common types of pneumonia and other serious infections the bacteria causes. **Wash your hands** with soap and water or clean your hands with a hand sanitizer with alcohol in it.

- **Cover your nose and mouth** with your arm or a tissue when you cough or sneeze.

## Is the pneumococcal vaccine safe?

Yes. In Canada, vaccines undergo laboratory and field-testing. They must pass a strict licensing procedure with the federal government before they can be used. Once a vaccine has been approved for use, every lot is tested for safety and quality. You cannot get pneumococcal disease from the pneumococcal vaccine.

## Who can get the pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine?

You should get the vaccine if you:

- are 65 years or older
- live in continuing or long-term care
- are 2 years or older and have any one of the below:
  - alcoholism
  - diabetes
  - cancer
  - HIV infection or AIDS
  - chronic heart, liver, or kidney disease
  - sickle cell disease
  - chronic lung disease, including asthma
  - solid organ or stem cell transplant
  - chronic cerebrospinal fluid leak
  - no spleen or your spleen doesn't work well
  - chronic neurological conditions that may impair clearing oral secretions
  - use illicit injection drugs
  - cochlear implant or are receiving one
  - weak immune system

## **Who should not have the pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine?**

The vaccine should not be given to people who:

- have a history of severe allergic reaction or other severe unusual reaction to this vaccine or any other part of the vaccine
- are under 2 years old (the vaccine is not approved for this age group)

Tell your nurse or healthcare provider if you have had the vaccine before.

## **How many doses of pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine do I need?**

Most people only need 1 dose of the vaccine in their lifetime. A few people will need to get a second dose of the vaccine. Your doctor or public health nurse will tell you if you need a second dose.

## **What are the possible side effects to the pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine?**

Most people have no reaction to the vaccine. Reactions that do happen are usually mild. They usually happen within 6 to 12 hours after the immunization and are usually gone within 24 to 48 hours. About half of the people who get the vaccine have swelling and soreness at the injection site. A few people might have fever and muscle pain.

As with any immunization, unexpected or unusual side effects can happen, including a severe allergic reaction.

## **What should I do if I have a reaction to the pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine?**

- Apply a cool, moist cloth where the needle was given to help reduce pain and swelling.
- Take a medicine like acetaminophen (e.g., Tylenol<sup>®</sup>) to reduce pain or a fever.
  - Do not give Aspirin<sup>®</sup> (ASA) to children under the age of 19 years.
- Report any unusual reactions to Health Link Alberta.

## **Where can I get the pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine?**

You can get the vaccine anytime of the year at Public Health Centres. In the fall, Public Health Influenza Immunization Clinics will have the pneumococcal vaccine available for those people who qualify for it.

Some doctor's offices in Alberta also give the vaccine.

For 24/7 nurse advice and general health information, call Health Link Alberta at:

- (403) 943-5465 in Calgary
- (780) 408-5465 in Edmonton
- Toll-free 1-866-408-5465 elsewhere in Alberta

You can also go to [www.MyHealth.Alberta.ca](http://www.MyHealth.Alberta.ca) for general health information.