



## Pneumococcal Disease

### What is pneumococcal disease?

Pneumococcal disease is an illness caused by bacteria. It can infect the lungs, the blood, and the membrane that covers the brain. It is most common in the winter and spring, but can occur year round.

### What are the symptoms of pneumococcal disease?

The most common symptoms are chills, fever, chest pain, shortness of breath, and a severe cough. Other symptoms include stiff neck, headache, pain when looking into bright lights, confusion, and ear pain. Most pneumococcal infections are mild. In some cases, the infection can be deadly or result in long-term problems, such as brain damage or hearing loss.

### How is pneumococcal disease spread?

The germs spread from person-to-person by direct contact with respiratory secretions such as saliva or mucus. They are sprayed into the air when a person coughs, sneezes or talks. People can carry the germs in their nose and throat, and can spread it without feeling sick.

### Who gets pneumococcal disease?

Anyone can get pneumococcal disease. Very young children (younger than 2 years old), children in group child care, people 65 years and older, and people of any age who have certain chronic medical problems, or with weakened immune systems are at highest risk.

### How is pneumococcal disease treated?

Pneumococcal disease is treated with antibiotics. Your healthcare provider will determine which treatment is best for you. Some pneumococcal infections are resistant to the antibiotics that are normally used, making treatment more difficult. People with more severe cases may need to be treated in the hospital, sometimes in intensive care.

### Can pneumococcal disease be prevented?

Yes. There are two vaccines that help prevent the disease. The pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV13) protects against 13 strains of pneumococcal bacteria most likely to cause severe infection in very young children. The pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine (PPSV23) protects against 23 strains of pneumococcal bacteria most likely to cause disease in older children and adults. Some people will need more than one dose of pneumococcal vaccine. Check with your health care provider to see what is best for you.

### Who should get the pneumococcal vaccines?

Vaccination is routinely recommended for infants and persons aged 65 and older. Vaccination is also advised for children and adults between the ages of two and 64 years, with underlying conditions such as:

- sickle cell disease
- organ transplantation
- leukemia
- lymphoma
- severe kidney disease
- HIV infection, or a weakened immune system
- CSF leaks
- cochlear implants
- asthma
- smoking

Talk to your healthcare provider to make sure you and your family are up-to-date on all recommended vaccines.

### **How safe are the pneumococcal vaccines?**

Any vaccine can cause side effects in some people. Reactions following vaccination are usually mild and self-limited. Some people who get pneumococcal vaccines have a little swelling and pain in the arm where the vaccine was given. This usually lasts for less than 2 days. Fever may occur within the first 2 days, particularly after the PCV13 immunization. Severe side effects, such as allergic reactions are rare.

