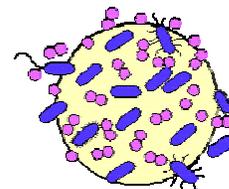


Pneumococcal Pneumonia Vaccine

What is the pneumococcal pneumonia vaccine?

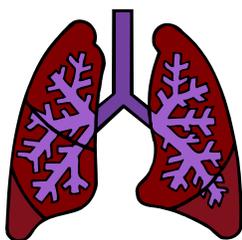
The pneumococcal pneumonia vaccine is an immunization, developed in 1977, that protects against the pneumococcal bacteria (*Streptococcus pneumoniae*). These bacteria can cause not only infections of the lungs (pneumonia), but also infections of the blood (bacteremia), the covering of the brain (meningitis), and other parts of the body. This vaccine protects against most but not all of the bacteria that cause pneumococcal disease. It is actually better at preventing death or severe complications from pneumococcal infections than it is at preventing the infection itself.



Why should you be vaccinated?

Pneumococcal disease is a constant threat. The risk of getting pneumococcal disease increases after age 40, doubling after age 60.

A common form of pneumococcal disease is pneumococcal pneumonia, a lung infection. This form of pneumonia is a common cause of death in the US. Pneumococcal pneumonia affects nearly 500,000 Americans each year, the majority of whom are age 65 and older. Of those who get pneumococcal pneumonia, almost 46,000 die from it each year. In many cases, pneumococcal pneumonia can be prevented by having the vaccination. Pneumonia can be caused by other germs, so this vaccine cannot protect you from all types of pneumonia, but it is effective against pneumococcal disease.



Who should have the vaccine?

Generally, anyone who is more likely to get pneumococcal infections or more likely to get very sick because of other health problems should take this vaccination.

Some specific examples of people who should get the vaccine include:

- ◆ all those age 65 and over (people age 50 to 64 can also benefit because of their higher risk of getting pneumococcal pneumonia)

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- ◆ adults with chronic diseases of the lungs, heart, liver, or kidneys (if your only chronic disease is frequent upper respiratory infections, ear infections, or sinus infections and you are under age 65, you do not need the vaccine)
 - ◆ adults with diabetes, alcoholism, or cirrhosis
 - ◆ adults with Hodgkin's disease, multiple myeloma, or lymphoma
 - ◆ adults anticipating having chemotherapy for cancer (they should have the shot at least 2 weeks before chemotherapy starts)
 - ◆ people over age 2 years with sickle cell disease or who have had their spleens removed
 - ◆ people over age 2 years with HIV infection or other conditions in which the body has a weakened immune system (it cannot fight off germs), such as after organ transplantation.

The Centers for Disease Control recommends getting a maximum of two doses of the pneumonia vaccine in your lifetime. The doses should be given at least 5 years apart.

Do not take the vaccine if you:

- ◆ have an **infection now** (until the infection symptoms go away)
- ◆ are **allergic to thimerosal** (a mercury derivative used as a preservative) or have had an allergic reaction to the vaccine in the past.

Talk to your health care provider before taking the vaccination if you think you are allergic to eggs.

Are there side effects to this vaccine?

After getting this vaccine you may have redness and pain at the injection site. Rarely (less than 1% of cases), fever, muscle aches, or severe local reactions occur. You can not get pneumococcal infection from the vaccine.

What other things should I know about this vaccine?

The cost of the vaccine is covered by Medicare and most state Medicaid insurance. It may be covered by private insurance that has a wellness benefit. Check with your insurance company.



You can get the vaccine at your health care provider's office or at most local health departments.

The vaccine can be given at the same time as the flu shot without increasing side effects.

Older adults should check with their health care provider about other necessary immunizations.

For more information, contact:

National Coalition for Adult Immunization
4733 Bethesda Avenue, Suite 750
Bethesda, MD 20814
301-656-0003

American Lung Association
1740 Broadway
New York, NY 10019-4374
1-800-586-4872

Web site: <http://www.lungusa.org>

You can also get information from your local health department.

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