

# Pneumococcal Disease

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## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### What is pneumococcal disease?

Pneumococcal disease is an illness caused by bacteria (germs) that can infect the lungs (pneumonia), the blood (bacteremia) and the membrane that covers the brain (meningitis). The disease is most likely to strike in the winter and spring, but there are cases year round.

The most common symptoms are chills, fever, chest pain, shortness of breath and a severe cough. Some people vomit or have seizures. Pneumococcal disease kills thousands of older people in the United States each year.

### Is pneumococcal disease dangerous?

Yes, it can be. Pneumococcal disease is one of the most common causes of vaccine-preventable death in this country. Every year, thousands of people need hospital treatment and more than 4,400 people die because of pneumococcal disease.

Pneumococcal infection is the most common cause of bacterial pneumonia. It is also a leading cause of meningitis, blood infection and ear infection in children.

### Who is most at risk for serious complications from pneumococcal disease?

Pneumococcal disease is common in young children. Older adults are at more risk of developing serious illness or death from pneumococcal disease.

### What are the symptoms and complications of pneumococcal disease?

Pneumococcal disease can cause many different kinds of infections. The symptoms will differ depending on the part of the body that is infected. It is also possible to have more than one infection at the same time.

Pneumococcal disease can have a combination of the following symptoms:

- Fever and chills
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Cough
- Chest pain
- Stiff neck
- Confusion or disorientation
- Sensitivity to light (photophobia)

Complications of pneumococcal infections can include:

- Inflammation around the lungs (empyema) and heart (pericarditis)
- Blockage of airway allowing air into the lungs (endobronchial obstruction)
- Hearing loss

- Loss of limbs
- Kidney failure
- Damage to brain, lungs or heart

Early diagnosis and treatment for serious pneumococcal infections are very important to avoid long-term complications.

### How do I prevent pneumococcal disease?

Vaccines are the best way to prevent pneumococcal disease.

### Who should vaccinated?

- Current PCV dosing and schedules recommend use of either PCV15 or PCV20 for all children aged 2 - 23 months.
- For children with an incomplete PCV vaccination status, Current PCV dosing and scheduling recommends use of either PCV15 or PCV20 for:
  - Healthy children aged 24 - 29 months
  - Children with specified risk conditions aged 24 - 71 months
- For children aged 2 - 18 years with any risk condition who have received all recommended doses before age 6 years:
  - Using at least 1 dose of PCV20: No additional doses of any pneumococcal vaccine are indicated. This recommendation may be updated as additional data become available.
  - Using PCV13 or PCV15 (no PCV20): A dose of PCV20 or PPSV23 using previously recommended doses and schedule is recommended.
- For children aged 6 - 18 years, with any risk condition, who have not received any dose of PCV13, PCV15, or PCV20, a single dose of PCV15 or PCV20 is recommended. When PCV15 is used, it should be followed by a dose of PPSV23 at least 8 weeks later, if not previously given.
- For those who have never received any pneumococcal conjugate vaccine, CDC recommends PCV15 or PCV20 for:
  - Adults 65 years or older
  - Adults 19 through 64 years old with certain medical conditions or other risk factors

*Adults who received an earlier pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV13 or PCV7) should talk with a vaccine provider to learn about available options to complete their pneumococcal vaccine series.*

Adults 65 years or older have the option to get PCV20 if they have already received:

- PCV13 (but not PCV15 or PCV20) at any age, and
- PPSV23 at or after the age of 65 years old

*These adults can talk with their doctor and decide, together, whether to get PCV20 or PPSV23.*

CDC recommends PPSV23 for:

- Children 2 through 18 years old with certain medical conditions that increase their risk of pneumococcal disease
- Adults 19 years or older who receive PCV15

Because of age or health conditions, some people should not get certain vaccines or should wait before getting them. Read the guidelines below specific to pneumococcal vaccines and ask your or your child's doctor for more information.

- Children younger than 2 years old should not get PPSV23.
- Anyone younger than 19 years old should not get PCV20.

### How safe are the pneumococcal vaccines?

Any vaccine can cause side effects in some people. Some people who get pneumococcal vaccine have a little swelling and pain in the arm where the shot was given. This usually lasts for less than two days. Some children getting PCV13 may have a fever that lasts a few days. Other side effects like aching muscles and severe side effects like allergic reactions are rare.

### Where can I get more information?

- Your doctor, nurse or clinic, a community pharmacist or your local public health unit.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:  
[cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd/pneumo/hcp/recommendations.html](https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd/pneumo/hcp/recommendations.html)

*This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. If you have questions about the disease described above or think that you may have this infection, consult a health care provider.*

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