



Pneumococcal Polysaccharide Vaccine

Vaccination can protect older adults (and some children and younger adults) from pneumococcal disease.

What is pneumococcal disease?

Streptococcus pneumoniae (pneumococcus) bacteria are the most common cause of bacterial pneumonia (infection of the lungs). These bacteria also attack different parts of the body and can cause bacteraemia (blood infections) and meningitis (serious infection of the fluid and lining of the brain and spinal cord). Healthy people often have pneumococcal bacteria in their mouths and upper respiratory systems. In most people the bacteria will not cause serious illness. However, in people with high-risk medical conditions and in the elderly, pneumococcal infections can be serious and can cause death. Also, pneumococcal bacteria are becoming increasingly resistant to antibiotics.

Why is pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine important?

Pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine can prevent pneumonia and other infections caused by 23 types of the *Streptococcus pneumoniae* bacteria. These 23 types account for approximately 9 out of 10 cases of pneumococcal disease. The vaccine is recommended for people with certain medical conditions listed below, and for people 65 years of age and older. The vaccine protects about 50 to 80 per cent of people against pneumococcal infection. Vaccination also makes the disease milder for those who may catch it.

Who should get the vaccine?

Pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine should be given to anyone 65 years of age and older, as well as to adults and children two years and older who have the following high-risk medical conditions:

- chronic respiratory, cardiac, renal and liver diseases
- diabetes mellitus
- chronic cerebrospinal fluid leak
- chronic neurologic conditions that may impair clearance of oral secretions
- no spleen or a spleen that does not work properly
- sickle-cell disease
- HIV infection
- other conditions and treatments that suppress the immune system
- hematopoietic stem cell transplant (candidate or recipient)
- solid organ or islet cell transplant (candidate or recipient)
- cochlear implant recipients (pre/post implant)
- malignant neoplasms, including leukemia and lymphoma
- residents of nursing homes, homes for the aged and chronic care facilities or wards

When should pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine be given?

The best time to get the vaccine is as soon as you develop a high-risk medical condition or when you turn 65. Because many people who should get the pneumococcal vaccine also get the flu shot every autumn, it would be a good idea to get them both at the same time. But remember – the pneumococcal vaccine is usually given just once in your lifetime and the influenza vaccine is given every year. Only a few people will need a second dose of the pneumococcal vaccine so talk to your doctor/nurse practitioner to determine if a second dose is recommended for you.

Are there side effects?

Some people have side effects from the vaccine, but these are usually minor and last only a short time. It is quite common to have some redness, soreness and swelling in the arm where the needle was given. Occasionally slight fever may occur. Other side effects such as headache, a high fever or fatigue may occur, but these are rare. **You should always discuss the benefits and risks of any vaccine with your doctor.**

Who should not have the vaccine?

- If you think you have already been vaccinated for pneumococcal disease, let the nurse know.
- The pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine is not recommended for children under two years of age.
- You should not have the vaccine if you have a severe allergy to the vaccine or any component of the vaccine (phenol, disodium phosphate, monosodium phosphate).

When should I call my doctor/nurse practitioner?

Call your doctor/nurse practitioner or go to the nearest hospital emergency department if any of the following symptoms develop within 3 days of getting the shot:

- hives
- swelling of the face or mouth
- trouble breathing
- very pale colour and serious drowsiness
- high fever (over 40°C or 104°F)
- convulsions or seizures
- other serious problems

Who should I talk to if I have any more questions the vaccine?

Talk to your doctor/nurse practitioner or call Renfrew County and District Health Unit Health Info Line at 613-735-8666 or 1-800-267-1097 Ext. 666.

Your record of protection

After you get any immunization, make sure your personal immunization record (Yellow Card) is updated. Keep it in a safe place!

Renfrew County and District Health Unit

7 International Drive
Pembroke, Ontario K8A 6W5
613-735-8666 or 1-800-267-1097, Ext. 666.

Adapted from the Ministry of Health and Long-term Care Pneumococcal Polysaccharide Fact Sheet (March 2002) and Publicly Funded Immunization Schedules for Ontario - August 2011.