

Pneumonia Vaccination

What Is Pneumococcal Pneumonia?

Pneumococcal pneumonia is a serious disease that attacks 200,000 people annual in the United States. About 1 out of every 20 people who get pneumococcal pneumonia dies from it. In fact, pneumococcal pneumonia kills more people in the U.S. each year than all other vaccine-preventable diseases combined.

Drugs such as penicillin were once effective in treating, these infections; but the disease has become more resistant to these drugs, making treatment of pneumococcal infections more difficult. This makes prevention of the disease through vaccination even more important.

Who can get Pneumococcal Pneumonia?

Anyone can get pneumococcal pneumonia. However, some people are at greater risk from the disease. These include;

- People 65 and older
- The very young
- People with special health problems such as alcoholism, heart or lung disease, kidney failure, diabetes, HIV infection, or certain types of cancer.

What is the Pneumococcal Vaccine?

The Pneumococcal Vaccine protects against 23 types of pneumococcal bacteria. Most healthy adults who get the vaccine develop protection to most or all of these types within 2 to 3 weeks of getting the shot.

Who should get the Pneumococcal Vaccine?

- All adults 65 years of age or older.

- Anyone over 2 years of age who has a long-term health problem such as: Heart disease, lung disease, sickle cell disease, diabetes, alcoholism, cirrhosis- leaks of cerebrospinal fluid.
- Anyone over 2 years of age who has a disease or condition that lowers the body's resistance to infection, such as: Hodgkin's disease, lymphoma, leukemia, kidney failure, multiple myeloma-nephrotic syndrome, HIV infection or AIDS, damaged spleen, or no spleen.
- Organ transplant
- Alaskan Natives and certain Native American populations.
- Anyone over 2 years of age who is taking any drug or treatment that lowers the body's resistance to infection, such as: long-term steroids, certain cancer drugs-radiation therapy

How many doses of Pneumococcal Vaccine are needed to prevent the disease?

Usually one dose of Pneumococcal Vaccine is all that is needed. However, under some circumstances, a second dose may be given. A second dose is recommended for those people aged 65 and older who got their first dose when they were under 65, if 5 or more years have passed since that dose.

A second dose is also recommended for people who:

- have a damaged spleen or no spleen
- have sickle-cell disease
- have HIV infection or AIDS

- have cancer, leukemia, lymphoma, multiple myeloma
- have kidney failure
- have nephrotic syndrome
- have had an organ or bone marrow transplant
- are taking medication that lowers immunity (such as chemotherapy or long-term steroids)

Children 10 years old and younger may get this second dose 3 years after the first dose. Those older than 10 should get it 5 years after the first dose.

Other facts about getting the vaccine

Pregnancy: The safety of Pneumococcal Vaccine for pregnant women has not yet been studied. There is no evidence that the vaccine is harmful to either the mother or the fetus, but pregnant women should consult with their doctor before being vaccinated. Women who are at high risk of pneumococcal disease should be vaccinated before becoming pregnant, if possible.

What are the risks from Pneumococcal Vaccine?

Pneumococcal Vaccine is a very safe vaccine. About half of those who get the vaccine have very mild side effects, such as redness or pain where the shot is given. Less than 1% develop a fever, muscle aches, or more severe local reactions. Severe allergic reactions have been reported very rarely. Getting the disease is much more likely to cause serious problems than getting the vaccine.