

Pneumococcal Disease Fact Sheet

Pneumococcal pneumonia and pneumococcal disease are caused by a bacterium

The bacterium is called *Streptococcus pneumoniae* (“pneumococci”). Pneumococci can cause ear infections and severe infections of the lungs (pneumonia), blood (bacteremia), and covering of the brain and spinal cord (meningitis). Increases in cases of pneumococcal pneumonia may occur during outbreaks of influenza.

Pneumococcal disease can be very serious. Infants, young children, persons 65 and older, and persons with underlying disease are at increased risk of getting pneumococcal disease

Persons are more likely to get very sick or die from pneumococcal disease if they have problems such as alcoholism, heart or lung disease, kidney failure, diabetes, cancer, weakness of the immune system, or sickle cell disease. Older persons as a group are more likely to die from pneumococcal disease. The high risk of death occurs despite treatment.

Antibiotics are used to treat pneumococcal disease

Two types of vaccine are available to prevent pneumococcal disease

One type of pneumococcal vaccine is recommended for all persons aged 65 and older, and for persons of any age (over 2 years old) who have heart or lung disease, kidney failure, diabetes, alcoholism, cirrhosis, sickle cell disease, and for Alaskan natives and certain American Indian groups. This vaccine is also recommended for those with a weakened immune system or who are taking drugs that weaken the immune system (including persons with cancer, organ transplant, infection with human immunodeficiency virus [HIV or AIDS], or who have had their spleen removed). This vaccine needs to be given only once initially, but it can be repeated in 5 years for those at highest risk.

A second type of pneumococcal vaccine has recently been licensed for use in infants and young children (called the “conjugate pneumococcal vaccine”). This vaccine is recommended for all children less than 2 years old. Additionally, the vaccine is recommended for certain children between 2 and 5 years old, including those who have sickle cell disease; chronic heart or lung disease; kidney failure; diabetes; or weakened immune systems (such as patients who have cancer, organ transplant, take steroids for a long time, or have HIV infection or AIDS). The vaccine can also be given to any child between 2 and 5 years old, children who attend group daycare, or children who are African-American, Alaskan Native, or American Indian. This vaccine may need to be given between 1 to 4 times depending on how old the child is. You should talk to your doctor to find out if your child should receive this vaccine.