

## Pneumococcal Vaccine

Vaccines or needles are the best way to protect against some very serious infections. The Canadian Paediatric Society and the National Advisory Committee on Immunization strongly recommends routine immunization.

This vaccine protects adults and children more than 2 years old against pneumococcal infections like pneumonia.

### What causes pneumonia?

There are two main kinds of pneumonia, one caused by viruses and the other caused by bacteria.

One type of bacteria is called *Streptococcus pneumoniae* (or pneumococcus). When these bacteria invade the lungs, they cause bacterial pneumonia. About eight out of 10 cases of bacterial pneumonia are caused by pneumococcus. These bacteria also attack different parts of the body. They can attack the blood cells and cause a serious infection called bacteraemia. They can also cause meningitis. Meningitis is a serious infection of the fluid and lining of the brain and spinal cord. Pneumonia, bacteraemia or meningitis can cause death in people with high risk medical conditions and the elderly.

About four out of 10 healthy people have pneumococcal bacteria in their mouths and upper respiratory systems. In most people, the bacteria will not cause serious illness. But in some people with high risk medical conditions, the bacteria can cause disease when it gets into the lung or blood.

Pneumococcal pneumonia, bacteraemia and meningitis are serious. Each year in Ontario, about 1,500 cases of serious pneumococcal disease are confirmed by laboratory tests, but the true number of cases is probably about 20 times higher.

### Why is pneumococcal vaccine important?

Pneumococcal vaccine can prevent pneumonia and other infections caused by 23 types of the *Streptococcus pneumoniae* bacteria. These 23 types account for nine out of ten cases of pneumococcal disease. The vaccine is recommended for people with certain long term diseases listed below, and people more than 65 years of age. Eight out of ten cases occur in these high risk groups. The vaccine protects about 60% of people against pneumococcal infection. Vaccination also makes the disease milder for those who may catch it.

... over

**Kingston**  
221 Portsmouth Avenue  
Kingston, ON K7M 1V5  
Tel: 613-549-1232  
1-800-267-7875  
Fax: 613-549-7896

**Cloyne**  
P.O. Box 59  
14209 Highway 41  
Cloyne, ON K0H 1K0  
Tel: 613-336-8989  
Fax: 613-336-0522

**Napanee**  
41 Dundas Street  
Napanee, ON  
K7R 1Z5  
Tel: 613-354-3357  
Fax: 354-6267

**Sharbot Lake**  
P.O. Box 149  
1130 Elizabeth Street  
Sharbot Lake, ON K0H 2P0  
Tel: 613-279-2151  
Fax: 613-279-3997

This pneumococcal vaccine has been used in Canada since 1983.

### **Who should get the vaccine?**

Pneumococcal vaccine should be given to anyone over 65. Adults and children more than 2 years old who have the following high risk medical conditions:

- chronic heart, lung or kidney disease
- nephrotic syndrome
- cirrhosis of the liver
- alcoholism
- diabetes mellitus
- chronic cerebrospinal fluid leak
- HIV infection and AIDS
- other immunosuppressive diseases
- no spleen or a spleen that does not work properly
- sickle cell disease.

### **When should pneumococcal vaccine be given?**

The best time to get the needle 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 (influenza vaccine) every autumn, it would be a good idea to get them both at the same time. But remember – the pneumococcal vaccine is given 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. Your doctor will know if you need another dose.

### **Are there side effects?**

Some people have side effects from the vaccine, but these are usually minor and last only a short time – five out of ten people will have some swelling and soreness in the arm where the needle was given. Occasionally slight fever may occur. Fewer than one in 100 people will have fever and muscle pain as well as some more serious swelling and pain on the arm.

### **Who should not have the vaccine?**

The pneumococcal vaccine used between 1978 and 1983 protected against only 14 types of the pneumococcus. People who received this vaccine do not usually need to get another shot.

- if you think you have already been vaccinated for pneumococcal disease, let your doctor know
- pneumococcal vaccine is not recommended for children under 2 years of age
- you should not have the vaccine if you have a severe allergy to any component of the vaccine.

### **Who should I talk to if I have any questions?**

Talk to your doctor or call your Health Unit.

### **Your record of protection**

After you receive any immunization, make sure the doctor updates your personal immunization record, such as the “Yellow Card.” Keep it in a safe place.

From: Queen’s Printer for Ontario – last modified: June 3, 1998  
<http://www.gov.on.ca/health/english/pub/immun/pnem.html>