

# Facts About Pneumococcal Disease for Adults

## What is pneumococcal disease?

Pneumococcal disease is an infection caused by a type of bacteria called *Streptococcus pneumoniae*. When these bacteria invade the lungs, they can cause pneumonia. They can also invade the bloodstream (bacteremia) and/or the tissues and fluids surrounding the brain and spinal cord (meningitis). Invasive pneumococcal infection kills thousands of people in the United States each year, most of them 65 years of age or older.

## Symptoms

The symptoms of pneumococcal pneumonia include fever, cough, shortness of breath, and chest pain. The symptoms of pneumococcal meningitis include stiff neck, fever, mental confusion and disorientation, and visual sensitivity to light (photophobia). The symptoms of pneumococcal bacteremia may be similar to some of the symptoms of pneumonia and meningitis, along with joint pain and chills.

## Prevention

There is a vaccine to protect adults against invasive pneumococcal disease. The vaccine is safe and effective. A single dose of the pneumococcal vaccine protects against 23 different types of *Streptococcus pneumoniae* bacteria that are responsible for some 75 percent of all pneumococcal disease cases in adults.

## Who should get pneumococcal vaccine?

- ◆ People who are 65 years of age or older.
- ◆ People 2 years of age or older who have a chronic illness such as cardiovascular or pulmonary (lung) disease, sickle cell disease, diabetes, alcoholism, chronic liver diseases, cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) leaks or a cochlear implant.
- ◆ People 2 years of age or older with a weakened immune system due to illnesses such as HIV infection, AIDS, chronic renal failure, nephrotic syndrome, organ or bone marrow transplantation, Hodgkin's disease, leukemia, lymphoma, multiple myeloma, generalized malignancy; those receiving immunosuppressive therapy (e.g., steroids), and those who have had their spleen removed or whose spleen is dysfunctional due to an illness such as sickle cell disease.
- ◆ People 2 to 64 years of age who are living in nursing homes or other long-term care facilities.
- ◆ People 19-64 years of age who smoke cigarettes or have asthma

## Vaccine Safety

The pneumococcal vaccine is safe and effective in preventing illness and death due to pneumococcal disease. Some people experience mild side effects, but these are usually minor and last only a short time. When side effects do occur, the most common include swelling and soreness at the injection site. A few people experience fever and muscle pain. As with any medicine, there are very small risks that serious problems could occur after getting the vaccine. However, the potential risks associated with pneumococcal disease are much greater than the potential risks associated with the pneumococcal vaccine. You cannot get pneumococcal disease from the vaccine.

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- FACT:** Invasive pneumococcal disease can be prevented with a safe, effective vaccine.
- FACT:** You cannot get pneumococcal disease from the vaccine.
- FACT:** Pneumococcal vaccine is fully covered by Medicare Part B if the healthcare provider accepts the Medicare-approved amount.
- FACT:** Pneumococcal vaccine can be given at any time during the year.
- FACT:** Pneumococcal vaccine can be given at the same time as influenza vaccine, but in the opposite arm.
- FACT:** Each year in the U.S., pneumococcal disease accounts for about 40,000 cases of invasive disease.
- FACT:** Only 64% of non-institutionalized adults 65 years of age or older, and less than 37% of adults in other recommended high-risk groups have received the pneumococcal vaccine.
- FACT:** A single dose of pneumococcal vaccine is recommended for most persons. Some people who were younger than 65 when they received the pneumococcal vaccine may need a second dose at 65 years of age or later.