

Pneumococcal Disease and the Vaccine (Shot) to Prevent It

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The best way to protect against pneumococcal disease is by getting the pneumococcal shot (PCV13). Doctors recommend that all children get the vaccine.

Why should my child get the pneumococcal shot?

The pneumococcal shot:

- Protects your child from potentially serious, and even deadly infections caused by pneumococcal disease, like pneumococcal meningitis (an infection of the tissue covering the brain and spinal cord) and pneumonia (lung infection).
- Keeps your child from missing school or child care (and keeps you from missing work to care for your sick child).

Is the pneumococcal shot safe?

Yes. The pneumococcal vaccine is very safe, and it is effective at preventing pneumococcal disease. Vaccines, like any medicine, can have side effects.

What are the side effects?

Most children don't have any side effects from the shot. When side effects do occur, they are usually mild and include the following:

- Fussiness
- Sleepiness
- Loss of appetite (not wanting to eat)
- Redness, swelling, or soreness where the shot was given
- Fever

Doctors recommend that your child get four doses of the pneumococcal vaccine for best protection. Your child will need one dose at each of the following ages:

- 2 months
- 4 months
- 6 months
- 12 through 15 months



There are more than 90 types of pneumococcal bacteria. The vaccine called PCV13 protects against the 13 types that cause most of the serious illness in children.

What is pneumococcal disease?

Pneumococcal disease is an illness caused by bacteria called pneumococcus. It is often mild, but can cause serious symptoms, lifelong disability, or death. Children younger than 2 years old are among those most at risk for the disease.

What are the symptoms of pneumococcal disease?

There are many types of pneumococcal disease. Symptoms depend on the part of the body it affects.

Pneumococcal pneumonia (lung infection) causes:

- Fever or chills
- Cough
- Rapid breathing or difficulty breathing
- Chest pain

Pneumococcal meningitis (infection of the covering of the brain and spinal cord) causes:

- Stiff neck or headache
- High fever
- Increased pain from bright lights
- Confusion

In babies, meningitis may cause poor eating and drinking, low alertness, or vomiting.

Blood infection (bacteremia and sepsis) from pneumococcal disease can cause fever, chills, or low alertness.

Pneumococcal disease causes up to half of middle ear infections (otitis media). Symptoms are ear pain; a red, swollen ear drum; or sometimes, fever or sleepiness.

Is it serious?

Pneumococcal disease ranges from mild to very dangerous. About 2,000 cases of serious disease (bacteremia, pneumonia with bacteremia, and meningitis) occur each year in children under 5 in the U.S. These illnesses can lead to disabilities like deafness, brain damage, or loss of arms or legs. About 1 out of 15 children who get pneumococcal meningitis dies.

How does pneumococcal disease spread?

Pneumococcal disease spreads when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Some children may not even feel sick, but they could have the bacteria in their noses and throats. These children can still spread pneumococcal disease.

Do children in the United States still get pneumococcal disease?

Yes. Each year in the U.S., pneumococcal disease causes thousands of cases of pneumonia and ear infections. Without vaccines, there would be many more cases. Among children, those younger than 2 years old are most likely to have a serious case of pneumococcal disease.

How can I learn more about the pneumococcal vaccine and my child?

To learn more about the pneumococcal vaccine, talk to your child's doctor, call 1-800-CDC-INFO or visit www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, American Academy of Family Physicians, and the American Academy of Pediatrics strongly recommend all children receive their vaccines according to the recommended schedule.