

Pneumococcal disease - immunisation

Pneumococcal immunisation is recommended for young children, the elderly and those with a serious underlying medical condition. Serious medical conditions include, but are not limited to, chronic heart, kidney, lung disease, diabetes, and impaired immunity.

These people are more likely to become seriously ill or die from this disease. Although pneumococcal disease can occur at any time of the year, it appears to be more common during winter and spring.

Serious side effects or allergic reactions to the vaccine are rare. If you are concerned about your reaction or your child's reaction to any vaccine, see your doctor immediately.

Immunisation can prevent serious complications and death

Pneumococcal immunisation may not always prevent disease from developing, but it can significantly reduce the risk of complications. Some of these complications can include:

- Pneumonia
- Septicaemia (blood infection)
- Meningitis (inflammation of the membrane covering the brain).

Two pneumococcal vaccines are available

Vaccines are available to help prevent infection with the most common strains of *Streptococcus pneumoniae*.

Vaccine for children

A vaccine called Prevenar 13 has been specifically formulated for young children whose immune systems do not respond to other vaccines. It protects against the strains that are responsible for at least 80 per cent of serious pneumococcal disease cases. The risk of infection in young children, especially those under two years of age, can be substantially reduced with this vaccine. It is routinely recommended for children aged two months to less than two years of age.

In July 2011, the pneumococcal vaccine (Prevenar) for children was replaced with a new version (Prevenar 13) that protects against more types of the bacteria that cause pneumococcal disease. Children who had all the necessary doses of pneumococcal vaccine before 1 July 2011 would have received the previous version of the vaccine.

To provide added protection, children aged 12-35 months (inclusive) are eligible for a one-off free supplementary dose of the new vaccine between 1 October 2011 and 30 September 2012. To receive the free dose, parents must arrange for their eligible child to see their doctor or attend a local council immunisation session between those dates.

Vaccine for adults

There is another vaccine (Pneumovax 23) that protects against some of the most virulent strains of the disease in adults and older children with high-risk medical conditions.

People who should be immunised

While pneumococcal immunisation can be done at any time of year, it is good to be protected before winter starts. It will protect you for five years. Booster doses of pneumococcal vaccine are recommended for older Victorians and people with underlying medical risk factors.

In Victoria, the vaccine is provided free of charge for people including:

- Children at two, four and six months of age
- Children under five years with certain medical risk factors, including being born under 28 weeks gestation – these children need extra doses of pneumococcal vaccine at 12 months and at four to five years of age
- Everyone aged 65 years or older
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged between 15 and 49 years with medical risk factors
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 50 years or older
- All public hospital outpatients and inpatients with medical risk factors.

Other people who should be immunised

Other people who should receive the pneumococcal vaccine include:

- Adults and children with chronic diseases such as heart disorders, diabetes, kidney disorders, asthma and chronic respiratory disorders
- People with immune deficiency from illness or medication (including long-term steroids)
- Transplant recipients or people with a damaged (or no) spleen
- Tobacco smokers.

The pneumococcal vaccine for these other groups is not funded under the National Immunisation Program. Speak to your doctor or immunisation provider for further information about the vaccine and its costs.

People who should not receive the vaccine

The pneumococcal vaccine should not be given if you:

- Have had an anaphylactic reaction in the past after having the vaccine
- Have received the vaccine within the last five years
- Have already received two or three doses depending on your medical risk factor
- Are pregnant
- Are suffering from an acute illness with fever.

Before immunisation

Before receiving the vaccine, tell your doctor or nurse if the person having the vaccine:

- Is under two years of age
- Is unwell
- Has ever had a serious reaction to any vaccine
- Has had a severe allergy to anything
- Has low immunity.

Possible side effects of the vaccine

Pneumococcal vaccine can cause a range of side effects. These are usually mild.

Common side effects include:

- Redness or mild pain at the injection site – this affects about half those who are immunised
- Low-grade fever
- Sleepiness
- Irritability.

Severe but rare side effects include:

- Swelling of the airway.

There is a very small risk of a serious allergic reaction to any vaccine. It is important to stay at the clinic where the immunisation was given for 15 minutes after the immunisation.

Reducing the side effects

The side effects of the immunisation can be reduced by:

- Drinking extra fluids and not overdressing if the person has a fever
- Taking paracetamol to reduce fever – check the label for the correct dose (especially for children)
- Placing a cold, wet cloth over the sore injection spot.

If you are concerned about any reaction to the vaccine, contact your doctor or hospital.

Where to get help

- In an emergency, call an ambulance on triple zero (000)
- Your doctor
- Your local council immunisation service
- NURSE-ON-CALL Tel. 1300 60 60 24 – for expert health information and advice (24 hours, 7 days)
- Your local community health centre
- Department of Health Victoria Immunisation Section Tel. 1300 882 008
- Emergency department of your nearest hospital
- National Immunisation Infoline Tel. 1800 671 811

Things to remember

- Pneumococcal immunisation is recommended for young children, the elderly and those with a serious underlying medical condition.
- The vaccine is provided free of charge for all young children and some people who are at increased risk.
- Any side effects to the vaccine are usually mild.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Department of Health - Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Unit

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