

Are you in an at risk group or aged 65 and over? – Make sure you get your pneumonia vaccination

Everybody in an at risk group or aged 65 and over should now be immunised to help protect them against pneumococcal infection which can cause diseases such as pneumonia, septicaemia (blood poisoning) and meningitis.

This leaflet describes these diseases and explains how you can protect yourself by having the pneumococcal (or pneumo) vaccine.

What is pneumococcal disease?

Pneumococcal disease is the term used to describe a range of illnesses such as pneumonia, septicaemia (blood poisoning) and meningitis (inflammation around the brain), when these are caused by the bacterium *Streptococcus pneumoniae*.

How is it spread?

The bacteria (germs) that cause pneumococcal disease are spread by coughing, sneezing or close contact between people. The bacteria get into the nose and throat and they may stay there without doing any harm. But sometimes they can invade the lungs or bloodstream causing pneumonia and septicaemia, or they can reach the brain and cause meningitis.

How can it be prevented?

Immunisation with pneumococcal vaccine helps prevent pneumococcal disease. This vaccine has been used successfully in a number of countries, including the UK where it has been used for more than 10 years.

Who is at risk?

The older you are, the greater the risk and you are also particularly vulnerable if:

- You also have a heart or lung condition
- Have diabetes mellitus
- Have no spleen
- Have a weakened immune system, for example, if you are having treatment for cancer

So, to provide the best protection, everyone in an at risk group or aged 65 and over is now being offered a routine pneumo jab.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of pneumococcal infection of the lungs are:

- A high fever
- Coughing
- Shaking chills
- Breathlessness
- Chest pains
- Confusion

The symptoms of pneumococcal meningitis are:

- A severe headache
- A stiff neck
- A high fever
- Confusion
- Sensitivity to light

You should contact your doctor if any of these symptoms is causing you concern.

Do I need to do anything to get the jab?

No, your doctor will invite you in for the jab. It can be given at any time of the year and can be given at the same time as your flu jab.

Is it possible to get the disease from the vaccine?

No, you cannot get pneumococcal disease from the vaccine as it does not contain live bacteria.

Will there be any side effects?

Side effects are usually mild and don't last very long. Your arm may be swollen and sore where you had the injection. Very occasionally you may have a fever or muscle pain.

How often will I need this vaccine?

Most people will only need to have the vaccine once. You may need a second dose if you have certain conditions such as:

- A damaged spleen or no spleen
- Problems with your kidneys

Talk to your doctor or practice nurse if you think this applies to you.

I think I've already had this jab. Do I need another one?

Check with your doctor or practice nurse if you think you've already had the jab. Unless you have one of the conditions listed above, you shouldn't need another jab.

Do people under 65 need the vaccine?

People who are at a higher risk from infection, such as those with other illnesses and medical conditions, are also recommended to have the pneumococcal vaccine. These are people with:

- Serious breathing problems, such as chronic bronchitis or emphysema
- Serious heart conditions
- Severe kidney disease
- Long-term liver disease
- Diabetes that needs medication
- Immunosuppression due to disease or treatment, for example, chemotherapy or radiotherapy for cancer, or long-term steroid for conditions such as asthma; and problems with the spleen.