



Pneumococcal Polysaccharide Vaccine

Immunization has saved more lives in Canada in the last 50 years than any other health measure.

What is the pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine?

The pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine protects against 23 types of pneumococcal bacteria. The vaccine is approved by Health Canada.

The pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine is not part of the routine schedule of childhood immunizations. For information on the routine pneumococcal vaccine for children, see [HealthLink BC File #62a Pneumococcal Conjugate \(PCV 13\) Vaccine](#).

Who should get the vaccine?

Some people are at high risk of getting sick from pneumococcal infections. The vaccine is provided free to these people, including:

- seniors 65 years and older; and
- residents of any age living in residential care, assisted living or other group facilities.

The vaccine is also provided free to persons 2 years of age and older with certain health concerns or medical conditions. People with the following conditions should receive one dose of the vaccine:

- no spleen, or a spleen that is not working properly*
- sickle-cell disease*
- immune systems weakened by disease or medical treatment*
- chronic liver disease, including cirrhosis, chronic hepatitis B or hepatitis C*

- chronic kidney disease*
- chronic heart or lung disease
- an islet cell or solid organ transplant, or a cochlear (inner ear) implant, or those who are waiting for one
- a stem cell transplant
- diabetes, cystic fibrosis, or a chronic cerebrospinal fluid leak
- an alcohol dependency
- homeless persons
- users of illicit drugs

*People in these groups should receive a second dose of vaccine several years after the first dose. Speak with your public health nurse or doctor about when to receive the second dose of vaccine.

It is important to keep a record of all immunizations received.

Benefits of the Vaccine

The vaccine is the best way to protect against pneumococcal infection, a serious and sometimes fatal disease.

When you get vaccinated, you help protect others as well.

Possible Reactions after the Vaccine

Vaccines are very safe. It is much safer to get the vaccine than to get pneumococcal disease.

Common reactions to the vaccine may include soreness, redness and swelling where the shot was given. Headache and mild fever may also occur. These reactions are mild and generally last 1 to 2 days.

Acetaminophen or Tylenol® can be given for fever or soreness. ASA or Aspirin® should NOT be given to anyone under 20 years of age due to the risk of Reye Syndrome.

It is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting any vaccine because there is an extremely rare possibility of a life-threatening allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. This may include hives, difficulty breathing, or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips. If this happens after you leave the clinic, call 9-1-1 or the local emergency number. This reaction can be treated and occurs in less than one in a million people who get the vaccine.

Report serious or unexpected reactions to your public health nurse or doctor.

Who should not get the vaccine?

Speak with your immunization provider (nurse, doctor, or pharmacist) if you have had a life-threatening reaction to a previous dose of pneumococcal vaccine, or any component of the vaccine.

Children under 2 years of age should not receive the pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine because it is not effective in young children. Such children receive the pneumococcal conjugate vaccine instead, starting at 2 months of age.

What is pneumococcal infection?

Pneumococcal infection is caused by a germ or bacteria. It can cause serious and life-threatening infections of the:

- lungs (pneumonia),
- blood (septicemia), and
- the lining that covers the brain (meningitis).

For every 4 people who get sick, 1 may die. Permanent complications of the infection include brain damage and deafness.

Pneumococcal infection is spread from one person to another by coughing, sneezing, or having close face-to-face contact. It can also

be spread through saliva or spit. This can occur through activities such as kissing or sharing of food, drinks, cigarettes, lipsticks, water bottles, mouth guards used for sports, or mouthpieces of musical instruments.

Mature Minor Consent

It is recommended that parents or guardians and their children discuss consent for immunization. Efforts are first made to seek parental/guardian or representative consent prior to immunization. However, children under the age of 19, who are able to understand the benefits and possible reactions for each vaccine and the risk of not getting immunized, can legally consent to or refuse immunizations.

For more HealthLink BC File topics, visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles/index.stm or your local public health unit.

Click on www.HealthLinkBC.ca or call **8-1-1** for non-emergency health information and services in B.C.

For deaf and hearing-impaired assistance, call 7-1-1 in B.C.

Translation services are available in more than 130 languages on request.



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