

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 [HealthLinkBC File#62a Pneumococcal conjugate \(PCV 13\) vaccine](#).

Who should get the vaccine?

The vaccine is free for people at high risk of getting sick from pneumococcal infections including:

- Adults 65 years and older
- Residents of long-term care and assisted living facilities

The vaccine is also free for anyone 2 years of age and older with the following conditions:

- No spleen, or a spleen that is not working properly
- Sickle-cell disease
- An immune system weakened by disease or medical treatment
- Chronic liver disease, including cirrhosis, chronic hepatitis B or hepatitis C
- Chronic kidney, 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
- A chronic neurological condition that makes it hard to clear fluids from the mouth or throat
- An alcohol use disorder
- Experiencing homelessness
- People who use illicit drugs

A second dose of vaccine is recommended for people with certain medical conditions. Speak with your health care provider to find out if you need a second dose and when you should get it.

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

What are the benefits of pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine?

The vaccine protects against pneumococcal infection, a serious and sometimes fatal disease. When you get immunized, you help protect others as well.

What are the 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 at the injection site. Low grade fever may also occur. These reactions are mild and generally last 1 to 2 days.

Acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (e.g. Advil®) can be given for fever or soreness. ASA (e.g. Aspirin®) should not be given to anyone under 18 years of age due to the risk of Reye syndrome.

For more information on Reye syndrome, please visit [HealthLinkBC File #84 Reye syndrome](#).

It is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting any vaccine. There is an extremely rare possibility of a life-threatening allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. This happens in less than 1 in a million people who get the vaccine. Symptoms may include hives, difficulty breathing, or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips. If this reaction occurs, your health care provider is prepared to treat it. Emergency treatment includes administration of epinephrine (adrenaline) and transfer by ambulance to the nearest emergency department. If symptoms develop after you leave the clinic, call **9-1-1** or the local emergency number.

Always report serious or unexpected reactions to your health care provider.

Who should not get the pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine?

Speak with your health care provider if you or your child have had a life-threatening reaction to a previous dose of pneumococcal vaccine or any part of the vaccine.

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

There is no need to delay getting immunized because of a cold or other mild illness. However, if you have concerns speak with your health care provider.

What is pneumococcal infection?

Pneumococcal infection is caused by *Streptococcus pneumoniae* bacteria. The bacteria can cause serious and life-threatening infections of the lining that covers the brain (meningitis), the blood (septicemia) and the lungs (pneumonia). Permanent complications of the infection include brain damage and deafness. For every 20 cases of pneumococcal meningitis, up to 5 people will die.

Pneumococcal infection is spread from one person to another by coughing, sneezing or close face-to-face contact. It can also spread through saliva. For example, by kissing or sharing food, drinks, cigarettes, lipsticks, water bottles, sport mouth guards or mouthpieces of musical instruments.

Mature minor consent

It is recommended that parents or guardians and their children discuss consent for immunization. Children under the age of 19, who can 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 information on mature minor consent please visit [HealthLinkBC File #119 The Infants Act, mature minor consent and immunization](#).



BC Centre for Disease Control
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