

Pneumococcal Disease

Fact Sheet



Maine Center for Disease
Control and Prevention
An Office of the
Department of Health and Human Services

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What is pneumococcal disease?

Pneumococcal disease is caused by the bacteria called *Streptococcus pneumoniae*. The disease is most common in the winter and spring, but may occur at any time of the year. Pneumococcal disease may cause serious illness if it is in the lungs (pneumonia), blood (bacteremia), or in the lining of the brain and spinal cord (meningitis). Pneumococcal disease is also a common cause of ear infections.

What are the signs and symptoms of pneumococcal disease?

Signs of disease may include: high fever, chills, cough, shortness of breath, earaches, feeling generally poorly, stiff neck, headache and mental confusion.

How is pneumococcal disease spread?

The disease is spread from person to person by coughing, sneezing, or contact with respiratory secretions. The bacteria that cause the disease can live in the nose and throat of healthy children and adults without causing illness.

How serious is pneumococcal disease?

Pneumococcal disease can be very serious in young children and older adults. Neurological problems, learning disabilities, hearing impairment and even death can occur during or after infection.

Who gets pneumococcal disease?

Anyone can get pneumococcal disease. People at highest risk include:

- Children under 2, and those in daycare
- People 65 years of age and older
- People with certain chronic medical problems, or weakened immune systems

How is pneumococcal disease treated?

Pneumococcal disease is treated with antibiotics. People with severe illness may need to be treated in a hospital.

How can I prevent pneumococcal disease?

The best way to prevent pneumococcal disease is to get vaccinated against the disease. Washing your hands and covering your cough and sneezes with your sleeve can also help protect you and others.

What vaccines are available?

Two vaccines (shots) are available to prevent pneumococcal disease.

1. Pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV7 or PCV13) is approved for infants and children younger than 5 years of age. It protects against the most common types of pneumococcal bacteria in infants and young children.
2. Pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine (PPV23) is approved for anyone over 2 years of age. It protects against the 23 types of pneumococcal bacteria most likely to cause disease in older children and adults.

Who should get a pneumococcal vaccine?

1. Pneumococcal conjugate vaccine:
 - All children from 6 weeks to 5 years.
2. Pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine:
 - All adults 65 years of age or older
 - Anyone 2 years of age or older with long term health problems such as diabetes, leaks of cerebrospinal fluid; heart, lung (not including asthma), kidney, or liver disease; or alcoholism
 - Adults 19 and older who smoke, or have asthma
 - People who live in nursing homes or other long-term care facilities

Adults should review their need for vaccination at every visit with their healthcare provider, especially at 50 and 65 years of age.

Where can I get more information?

For more information contact your healthcare provider or local health center. You can also contact the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention by calling 1-800-821-5821 or visiting the website <http://www.mainepublichealth.gov>. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website - <http://www.cdc.gov> - is another excellent source of health information.