

Adult Immunizations: Pneumococcal

Every year, thousands of adults over the age of 65 suffer from severe illnesses, and many may even die, from diseases that can be prevented.

Pneumococcal disease is an infection that can cause many different types of illnesses, some mild, some very serious.

The good news is that Pneumococcal disease can be prevented, the best way is to get vaccinated.

Pneumococcal bacteria live in the noses and throats of many healthy people.

It can cause a mild infection if it spreads to your ears or sinuses.

But if it spreads to other parts of your body it can cause more serious infections.

In your lungs it can cause pneumonia; in your bloodstream it can cause bacteremia; and in your spinal cord and brain it can cause meningitis; all very serious, even life-threatening health problems for people aged 65 or older or for people with long-term health conditions.

The best way to prevent Pneumococcal disease is to get vaccinated.

These vaccines contain a dead part of a germ, in this case, the Pneumococcal bacteria. It won't make you sick, but your body reacts to the vaccine by making antibodies which fight against the germs in order to protect your body.

After getting a vaccine, when your body comes in contact with those germs again, it already has the ability to fight them and can help prevent the infection.

If you are 65 years old or older, over 19 years old and have certain health conditions, a weakened immune system or are a smoker talk to your healthcare provider about getting vaccinated for Pneumococcal disease.

If you have ever had a severe allergic reaction to a vaccine, tell your healthcare provider before getting these vaccines.

If you are allergic to the ingredients in these vaccines, you should not get them. Most vaccines are given by injection.

Most people will need two vaccines in order to fully prevent all types of Pneumococcal: PCV13 and PPSV23.

You should receive a dose of PCV13 first.

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If you are over 65, aren't immunocompromised, and have never received PCV13 before talk to your healthcare provider about if this vaccine is right for you.

Twelve months later you can receive the dose of PPSV23. Those who are immunocompromised can receive it earlier.

Do not get both vaccines at the same time. Make sure you know which vaccine you are getting and have received.

In some cases your healthcare provider may recommend you get a booster of the PPSV23 vaccine to make sure you are fully protected.

The Pneumococcal vaccine is safe. But as with any medication, there is a small risk of side effects.

The most common side effect is a reaction at the injection site. Look for redness, swelling and soreness at the site. These should go away after a few days.

Less common side effects may include fever and muscle aches.

If you have a severe reaction like trouble breathing, hives, swelling of your face or throat or if you have chest pain, fast heartbeat, dizziness, feel like you are going to pass out call 911 and get help immediately.

This is not the complete list of side effects. Make sure you discuss all possible side effects with your healthcare provider.

You can get your Pneumococcal vaccine at your next healthcare appointment. Or you can get it at your local pharmacy or community health clinic.

It's a good idea to keep a list of all vaccines you get so you don't double-up in the future. Ask your healthcare provider for a print-out of your records or keep a log yourself. Your records should include the date, type of vaccine dose and where you got it. Let a family member know where you keep this list in case of emergency.

Pneumococcal disease can cause serious, sometimes life-threatening health problems. But it can be prevented.

If you are over the age of 65, talk to your healthcare provider or pharmacist about getting vaccinated. It is the best way to prevent infection and stay healthy.