



## 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?

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 or assisted living facilities.

The vaccine is also provided free to anyone who is 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 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; and
- users of illicit drugs, especially those who smoke crack cocaine.

A 2<sup>nd</sup> dose of vaccine is recommended for people with certain medical conditions. Speak with your health care provider to find out if you need a 2<sup>nd</sup> dose of vaccine 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 is the best way to protect 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 where the vaccine was given. 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.

\*Ibuprofen should not be given to children under 6 months of age without first speaking to your health care provider.

For more information on Reye Syndrome, see [HealthLinkBC File #84 Reye Syndrome](#).

It is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting any vaccine because there is an extremely rare possibility, less than 1 in a million, of a life-threatening allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. This may include hives, difficulty breathing, or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips. Should this reaction occur, 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.

It is important to 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 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. These children receive the pneumococcal conjugate vaccine starting 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 such as meningitis, an infection of the lining that covers the brain, septicemia, an infection of the blood, and pneumonia, an infection of the lungs.

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

Pneumococcal infection is spread from person to person by coughing, sneezing, or having close face-to-face contact. It can also be spread through saliva. 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. 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 information on mature minor consent see [HealthLinkBC File #119 The Infants Act, Mature Minor Consent and Immunization](#).

For more information on immunizations, visit ImmunizeBC at <https://immunizebc.ca/>.



ImmunizeBC



BC Centre for Disease Control  
An agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority