

Pneumococcal Disease (Sickness Caused by *Streptococcus pneumoniae*)

What is pneumococcal disease?

Pneumococcal disease is an infection caused by the bacteria *Streptococcus pneumoniae*. It's also called pneumococcus and can cause ear infections, pneumonia, infections in the blood and meningitis.

When does it happen?

Children can get pneumococcal disease any time of the year.

What are the symptoms?

- Fever and increased fussiness or irritability are common
- Meningitis symptoms include fever, trouble bending or moving the neck, increased fussiness or irritability, and headache in anyone over age 2. In babies, the only symptoms may be that the baby is less active, fussy or crying more than usual, throwing up, or not eating normally.
- Pneumonia symptoms in children include fever, cough, working hard to breathe, breathing faster than usual or grunting.
- Ear infection symptoms are ears that hurt, crying or pulling on ears, sore throat or pain when swallowing. Children may also be sleepy, have a fever, and be fussy.

Is it contagious? How is it spread?

Pneumococcus is spread by contact with people who either have a pneumococcal illness or who carry the bacteria in their throats without being sick. It can be spread by droplets in the air from coughing or sneezing. It can also be spread if you touch something that has the droplets on it, and then touch your own nose, mouth or eyes.

How bad is pneumococcal disease?

Pneumococcal disease can be very bad for young children and is the most common cause of meningitis and bacterial pneumonia in children.

How can pneumococcal disease be avoided in children?

There is a vaccine that can help stop serious pneumococcal disease, such as meningitis and blood infections. It can also stop some ear infections.

Children who are vaccinated when they are babies will have the most protection against the disease. Some older children who are high risk for pneumococcal infection may be able to get an extra dose of the vaccine.

Who should get the vaccine and when?

Children under 2 years of age should get shots at:

- 2 months
- 4 months
- 6 months
- 12 to 15 months

Children who weren't vaccinated at these ages can still get the vaccine. Ask your doctor for details about getting them vaccinated.

Children between 2 and 5 years of age:

Children between 2 and 5 years old who weren't vaccinated before they turned 2 and are at high risk of serious pneumococcal disease can get the vaccine. This includes children who:

- have sickle cell disease,
- have a damaged spleen or no spleen,
- have HIV/AIDS,
- have other illnesses that affect the immune system, like diabetes, cancer, or liver disease,
- who take medicines that affect the immune system, such as chemotherapy or steroids,
- have long-term heart or lung disease.

The vaccine should be considered for all other children under age 5 years, especially those at higher risk of serious pneumococcal disease. This includes children who:

- are under 3 years of age,
- are of Native American/Alaskan Native or African American descent, or
- go to group daycare.

The number of doses needed depends on the child's age. Ask your doctor for more details.

This vaccine may be given at the same time as other vaccines.

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