

Pneumococcal Vaccination in Adults

By DANIELLE BROWNLEE

Pharm.D.

What Is Pneumococcal Disease?¹⁻³

Pneumococcal disease is caused by a type of bacteria referred to as *Streptococcus pneumoniae*. These bacteria can affect different areas of the body leading to a variety of illnesses. Serious infections that may develop include: pneumonia, if the bacteria get into the lungs; meningitis, if the bacteria attack the covering on the brain; or bacteremia, if the blood is infected.

Who Is at Risk for Contracting Pneumococcal Disease?^{1,3,4}

Anyone can contract pneumococcal disease, and the severity of the illness varies for each person. However, there are certain groups of people that are at a higher risk of developing pneumonia: adults aged 65 years or older; children five years or younger; smokers; and people who have chronic health problems such as sickle cell disease, heart failure, diabetes, asthma and chronic lung diseases or have a weak immune system.

How Can Pneumococcal Disease Be Prevented?⁴

Since pneumonia can be a serious illness and may even cause death, it is very important to help prevent the infection. Some tips include the following:

- Get vaccinated
- Wash your hands properly
- Cover coughs and sneezes
- Avoid smoking
- Maintain a healthy diet and exercise program to keep a stronger immune system

The Pneumococcal Vaccine

Over time, the antibiotics used to treat pneumococcal disease are becoming less effective. For this reason, it is important for patients to be immunized against the pneumococcal bacteria. There are different vaccines available, but only one is for use in adults. Pneumovax[®] is the vaccine used in adults to aid in the prevention of pneumococcal disease.¹⁻³ It is not used to treat pneumococcal disease.³ The vaccine protects against 23 types of pneumococcal bacteria that are most likely to cause disease.^{1,3} Currently, Pneumovax[®] is recommended in all adults age 19-64 years with chronic or immunosuppressing medical conditions, including asthma, as well as those



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who smoke cigarettes. Smokers are also recommended to receive smoking cessation guidance. In addition, routine use is no longer recommended for Alaska Natives or American Indians under the age of 65, unless they have medical or other indications or are aged 50-64 years and live in areas where risk of the disease is increased.

How Often Is the Vaccination Recommended?³

Depending on when a person first receives the Pneumovax[®] vaccine, an additional dose may or may not be required. A one-time dose is recommended in people 65 years and older. In those receiving a dose prior to this, an additional dose is recommended in people 65 years and older after at least five years have passed since the last pneumococcal vaccination. A second dose is also recommended in some patients younger than 65 years if they

have conditions lowering their ability to fight infections. Ask the doctor or pharmacist administering the vaccine if and when an additional shot is recommended for you.

What Are the Possible Side Effects From the Vaccine?

Pneumovax[®] has been deemed safe by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), but even though it is safe, there may still be some side effects experienced in some people. Mild pain, swelling, itching or redness where the shot is administered is common; more than half of the people receiving the vaccine experience this side effect.^{1,3} Other less common side effects include fever, headache, muscle aches and fatigue.^{1,3}

While the majority of side effects are mild in nature, there is a small possibility of a serious reaction that could result in harm or death. Signs of a serious reaction include a high fever or changes in behavior.³ If it is an allergic reaction, a variety of symptoms may occur. The most common sign of allergic reaction is hives (redness and swelling of the skin).³ Other signs could include: difficulty breathing, wheezing, coughing, choking, a racing heart rate or dizziness.³

If a serious reaction does occur, it is important to call your physician immediately and provide information about the type of reaction, the date the vaccine was administered and when the reaction occurred.

Government Action and You⁵

The United States Department of Health and Human Services sets 10-year goals to promote health and prevent disease. Recent and future healthy people goals include decreasing the incidence of pneumococcal infections and increasing vaccination rates. To help protect yourself against pneumococcal diseases, ask your doctor or pharmacist if you are a candidate for the vaccine. Some insurance companies will cover the vaccine at your local pharmacy with a prescription from your doctor, including Medicare Part B and some Part D plans. Ask your pharmacist or physician if you have further questions or would like more information regarding Pneumovax[®].

For more information, ask your pharmacist!

This information is provided by Michigan Pharmacists Association and: