

Pneumococcal Infection

This fact sheet provides basic information only. It must not take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always talk to a healthcare professional about any health concerns you have, and before you make any changes to your diet, lifestyle or treatment.

What is pneumococcal infection?

Pneumococcal infection is caused by a germ (or bacteria). It can cause serious and life-threatening infections including meningitis, an infection of the lining that covers the brain, and septicemia, an infection of the blood. For every 20 people who get sick, up to 5 will die. Permanent complications of infection include brain damage and deafness.

How is pneumococcal infection spread?

Pneumococcal infection is spread from one person to another by coughing, sneezing or close face-to-face contact. It can also be spread through saliva or spit. 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.

How can I prevent getting pneumococcal infection?

You can reduce the risk of catching pneumococcal infection, or spreading it to others by washing your hands regularly, eating well and exercising, and getting the pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine.

Two types of pneumococcal vaccine are available today. Pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine and pneumococcal conjugate vaccine

Pneumococcal Polysaccharide Vaccine

The pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine protects against 23 types of pneumococcal bacteria. The pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine is not part of the routine schedule of infant immunizations as it is not effective in children younger than two years of age. However, it is recommended in the instances listed below:

Who should get the polysaccharide 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
- Residents of any age living in residential care, assisted living or other group facilities.

The vaccine is also provided free to persons 2 years of age and older with certain medical conditions. People with the following conditions should receive one dose or shot of the vaccine, including those who have:

- no spleen, or a spleen that is not working properly*
- sickle-cell disease*
- 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 are waiting for one

- had a stem cell transplant
- diabetes, cystic fibrosis or a chronic cerebrospinal fluid leak
- an alcohol-dependency.

* People in these groups should receive a second dose of vaccine several years after the first dose. Speak with your community health nurse or doctor about when to receive the second dose of vaccine.

It is important to keep a record of all immunizations received.

Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccine

The pneumococcal conjugate vaccine is part of Yukon's childhood immunization program. It offers protection against the seven types of pneumococcal bacteria that most often infect children. Infants are offered this vaccine beginning at two months of age.

Benefits of the Vaccine

The vaccine is the best way to protect against pneumococcal infection, a serious and sometimes fatal disease. When you get vaccinated, you help protect others as well.

Immunization has saved more lives in Canada in the last 50 years than any other health measure.

Who should not get the Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccine?

Speak with a community health nurse or doctor if you have had a life-threatening reaction to a previous dose of pneumococcal vaccine, or any component of the vaccine including phenol. Children under two years of age should receive only the conjugate type of vaccine.

Contact Information

For more information contact Yukon Communicable Disease Control at 667-8323. #4 Hospital Road, Whitehorse, Yukon

In the communities call toll-free 1-800-661-0408 extension 8323.

For immunization information, contact your local health centre.

Adapted from BC HealthFiles