

Should I be Vaccinated?

Vaccines are not just for children. Immunizations are the most effective and long lasting protection against disease. It's important to keep your immunizations up to date.

The 'pneumonia vaccine'

Pneumococcal Disease or 'PD' is an infection caused by a type of bacteria (*Streptococcus pneumoniae*). When this bug invades the body, it can lead to serious illness, such as pneumonia. But the bacteria can also cause blood poisoning and meningitis, which is inflammation of the tissues around the brain and spinal cord.

PD bacteria can travel through the air and spread by close contact, through sneezing, coughing, or kissing. It can also be picked up from surfaces and objects. The most common signs and symptoms are fever, chills, sweat, aches and pains, and headaches.

Pneumococcal vaccination can prevent pneumonia and other infections caused by this bacteria. It is recommended for people 65 and older, and for those with conditions that affect the immune system, such as:

- Cancer, including leukemia
- Chronic heart, liver, or kidney disease
- Chronic lung disease (except asthma)
- Nephrotic syndrome
- Cirrhosis of the liver
- Alcoholism
- Diabetes mellitus
- Chronic cerebrospinal fluid leak
- HIV infection and AIDS
- No spleen or a spleen that does not work properly
- Sickle cell disease.

About eight out of 10 cases occur in these high-risk groups. The vaccine protects about 65% per cent of people. Vaccination also makes the disease milder for



those who may catch it. The pneumococcal vaccine has been used in Canada since 1983.

Are there side effects?

Side effects of pneumococcal vaccines are usually very mild. Occasionally, a fever may occur. It is also common for your arm to be a bit red, sore or swollen where the needle went in. Other possible side effects may include headaches or fatigue. Allergic reactions can occur.

Five tips for reducing your risk of contracting PD

1. If you are over 65 or in a risk group, see your doctor about getting the vaccine.
2. Wash your hands.
3. Be active.
4. Get enough sleep, as this can help to keep your immune system strong.
5. Have regular check-ups with your doctor.

Learn more

The National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) makes recommendations for the use of vaccines in Canada. To see their guidelines, visit: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/naci-ccni.

The Canadian Public Health Association has information on adult immunization. www.cpha.ca/immunization