

Childhood pneumococcal disease

The National Immunisation Program schedule provides free pneumococcal vaccine to all infants at two, four and 12 months of age. Children less than five years of age with serious medical conditions may also need extra doses of pneumococcal vaccine.

Pneumococcal disease

Pneumococcal disease in young children causes serious illness such as blood infection and even death. A child with a serious medical condition is at greater risk of life threatening infection and hospitalisation.

Most people carry *Streptococcus pneumoniae* bacteria in the nose and throat. The bacteria are spread by droplets from the mouth and nose such as coughing and sneezing or by contact with articles contaminated by infected droplets.

Pneumococcal infections attack different parts of the body. For example:

- if the pneumococcal bacteria gets into the blood stream it's called bacteraemia
- if it attacks a specific part of the brain, it's known as meningitis
- if the pneumococcal bacteria attacks the lungs, it's known as pneumonia
- if it infects the middle ear, it's called otitis media.

Pneumococcal vaccines

A vaccine for children has been shown to be up to 90 per cent effective against severe forms of pneumococcal disease. However there are more than 90 strains of pneumococcal disease. One

pneumococcal vaccine covers strains that cause 80 per cent to 90 per cent of cases of severe pneumococcal disease. Another pneumococcal vaccine suitable for older children is also given if the child has a serious medical condition, as it contains more strains to protect against pneumococcal infection. The vaccines contain inactive components of some strains of pneumococcal bacteria to stimulate an immune response.

Who is eligible for the free vaccine?

- All infants at two, four and 12 months of age.
- Children up to five years of age with serious medical conditions which put them at higher risk of pneumococcal infection. These children need extra doses of pneumococcal vaccine at six months and at four to five years of age.

Please talk to your doctor to discuss serious medical conditions such as:

- HIV infection
- blood malignancies
- cystic fibrosis
- CSF leak
- intracranial shunt
- cochlear implants
- immune deficiency from illness, medication or treatment
- impaired spleen function or no spleen
- Down syndrome
- all infants born less than 28 weeks gestation
- chronic diseases of the heart, lung, kidney and diabetes.

Possible side effects of pneumococcal vaccine

Common side effects

- pain, redness and swelling at the injection site
- low grade temperature.

Extremely rare side effect

- severe allergic reaction.

If mild reactions do occur, the side effects can be reduced by:

- placing a cold wet cloth on the sore injection site
- not overdressing your child
- paracetamol might be required to ease discomfort and/or high fever (check label for correct use)
- giving your child extra fluids to drink.

If reactions are severe or persistent, or if you are worried about your child, contact your doctor or hospital.

Pre-immunisation checklist

Before you have your child immunised, tell the doctor or nurse if your child:

- Is unwell on the day of immunisation
- Has had a severe reaction to any vaccine
- Is allergic to any component of the vaccine

Further information

For more information search 'childhood immunisation' at www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

For translated versions of this document go to www.healthtranslations.vic.gov.au

For information about the National Immunisation Program visit www.immunise.health.gov.au/

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