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What you need to know about pneumococcal disease

About pneumococcal disease...

What is pneumococcal disease?

Pneumococcal disease is a bacterial disease that can cause four serious infections:

- meningitis (brain infection)
- bacteremia (bloodstream infection)
- pneumonia (lung infection)
- otitis media (middle ear infection)

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Complications from pneumococcal infections can cause serious harm to children, including brain damage and death.

What are the symptoms of pneumococcal disease?

Because pneumococcal disease can cause four different bacterial infections, the symptoms may vary, depending on which type of infection your child has. All of the related infections cause fever, fussiness and loss of appetite. In *meningitis* and *bacteremia* children's fevers are especially high and are often accompanied by stiff neck, headache and vomiting. Children with *pneumonia* may cough up thick mucus and may have trouble breathing, while children with *otitis media* have severe ear pain.


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-  **A Parent's Guide to Immunization**

How can my child catch pneumococcal disease?

Pneumococcal germs are very common and easily spread when people are in close contact, especially through sneezing, coughing and kissing.

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Many people, including young babies carry the pneumococcal germ in their nose and throat. These *healthy carriers* do not get sick themselves, but they can make children sick when they sneeze or cough. Your child could also be infected by putting their hands in their mouths, after coming into contact with the germ. The disease can also be spread when children touch an infected object such as a cup, toothbrush, toy or book.

Why is pneumococcal disease serious?

Pneumococcal disease can be serious—especially for infants and young children. Some children are more at risk than others. Children who are under the age of two, have weak immune systems and have chronic diseases are at particular risk of complications. Young children who attend daycare or who have taken antibiotics within the past three months may also be at greater risk.

Infections caused by pneumococcal disease can be deadly, and can cause lifelong damage to the brain, the ears and to major organs, even with antibiotic treatment.

Why should my child be immunized against pneumococcal disease?

Children who are not immunized against pneumococcal disease are at a high risk of getting very sick. The best way to protect children against pneumococcal disease is to make sure that they get the pneumococcal disease vaccine. Because people can be *carriers* of the disease, without *knowing* that they have it, it could be passed on to children who are not immunized.

About the pneumococcal disease vaccine...

What kind of vaccine is given to prevent pneumococcal disease?

The pneumococcal vaccine is available in two forms—one for very young children and another for older children and adults. Both forms of the pneumococcal disease vaccine are given by needle and are **very safe**. Like all [vaccines authorized for use in Canada](#), they went through several stages of rigorous testing before being authorized

for use.

Are there any side effects from the pneumococcal disease vaccine?

Side effects of the pneumococcal disease vaccine are usually very mild. Your child may have a slight fever, be fussy, sleepier or have less appetite than usual. Your child's arm or thigh might be a bit red or sore where the needle went in. Some children will have a mild fever. Other possible side effects may include vomiting, diarrhea, rash or hives. These side effects usually happen 12 to 24 hours after the immunization and usually go away within a few days.

When should my child get the pneumococcal disease vaccine?

Canadian guidelines recommend that all children get the pneumococcal vaccine at 2 months, 4 months, 6 months and between 12 and 15 months.

Older children can also get the vaccine. Speak to your doctor about the vaccine that is best for your child. Schedules may vary from province to province. Calculate [your child's personal immunization schedule](#).

Who should **not** get the pneumococcal disease vaccine?

A child who has had a severe allergic reaction to a previous dose of the pneumococcal disease vaccine should not get the vaccine again.

Signs of a severe allergic reaction would include breathing problems (wheezing), swelling and blotchy skin on the body (hives) or around the mouth. If you see any of these symptoms or are concerned about your child's health, it's always a good idea to check with your doctor or public health office (CLSC in Quebec).

Related Information

- [Can you separate vaccine fact from fiction?](#)
- [More answers to your top vaccine questions](#)
- [Pneumococcal disease information for Health Professionals](#)