Pneumococcal Vaccines Explained:
Answers for Adults 50+

CVEEP
Fighting Infectious Respiratory Disease

What is pneumococcal disease?

Pneumococcal disease refers to an illness caused by a specific bacteria, which can lead to infection. These infections can range from mild illness, like ear or sinus infection, to serious and potentially life-threatening conditions such as pneumonia (lung infection), meningitis (infection of the brain and spinal cord), and bacteremia (infection of the bloodstream). Severe cases often require time in the hospital and can lead to long-term complications or death.[1]

Are older adults at increased risk?

Yes. As you get older, your immune system can weaken, which can put adults 50 and older at greater risk of pneumococcal infections. This reduced immune system response increases the likelihood of severe illness, health complications, and time in the hospital.

Why should I get vaccinated?

Vaccination is the most simple, effective tool to help protect yourself from severe pneumococcal disease. Pneumococcal vaccination helps your immune system recognize and fight the bacteria, helping lower your risk of infection, hospital visits, and long-term health setbacks.

Who should get a pneumococcal vaccine?

Pneumococcal vaccines are recommended for all adults ages 50 and older. Adults ages 19-49 who are at increased risk for pneumococcal disease—such as those with chronic heart, liver, or lung disease, among other risk factors—are also recommended to get vaccinated. Speak with a healthcare provider to learn more.[1]

Do I need to get a pneumococcal vaccine if I've had pneumonia before?

Yes. Even if you've had pneumonia in the past, you may still need a pneumococcal vaccine. There are different strains of bacteria that can cause illness, and getting sick once does not provide protection against future infections. Vaccination helps your immune system recognize and respond to multiple strains, which lowers your risk of getting pneumonia again or developing more severe outcomes.

What pneumococcal vaccine options are available?

There are two types of vaccines, pneumococcal conjugate vaccines (PCVs) and pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccines (PPSVs). Your recommended vaccine depends on a range of factors such as your age, medical risk factors, and prior pneumococcal vaccine history. Depending on your situation, vaccination may involve one dose of a PCV alone or a PCV followed by a PPSV. A healthcare provider can help determine which option is best for you.

When is the best time to get a pneumococcal vaccine?

You can receive a pneumococcal vaccine at any time of year. Pneumococcal infections occur year-round, and vaccination provides ongoing protection whenever it is received.

Will my insurance cover a pneumococcal vaccine?

Nearly all private and public health insurance plans, including Medicare, Medicaid, and employer-sponsored insurance, cover recommended vaccines at no cost to you. If you don't have health insurance, contact your local or state health department to find free or low-cost vaccine programs.[2]

Where can I get the vaccine? What if my doctor doesn't have any in stock?

Pneumococcal vaccines are available at doctor's offices, pharmacies, and public health or community health clinics. If your provider or pharmacy is out of stock, ask for a referral or contact your state health department.[3] You can also use CVEEP's vaccine locator tool to find nearby vaccination locations.

CVEEP Vaccine Locator Tool

Are there any side effects from the vaccine?

Like all vaccines, pneumococcal vaccination can cause mild, temporary side effects. Common ones include pain, redness, and swelling at the injection site as well as fatigue, fever, headache, and muscle or joint pain. There may be instances when someone shouldn't get a pneumococcal vaccine if they have a severe allergy to a specific vaccine ingredient or have previously had a life-threatening allergic reaction to a pneumococcal vaccine. Vaccines are continually monitored for safety—by reducing associated hospitalizations and deaths, the benefits of pneumococcal vaccination outweigh potential risks.[3]

[1] https://www.cdc.gov/pneumococcal/about/index.html
[2] https://www.cdc.gov/pneumococcal/hcp/vaccine-recommendations/index.html
[3] https://www.cdc.gov/pneumococcal/vaccines/index.html

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