

Aged over 65?

Make sure
you get your
pneumo jab



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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Everybody aged 65 and over should be immunised to help protect them against pneumococcal disease.

What is pneumococcal disease?

Pneumococcal disease is the term used to describe a range of infections such as pneumonia, septicaemia (blood poisoning) and meningitis (inflammation of the brain), when these are caused by the bacterium (germ) *Streptococcus pneumoniae*.

How is it spread?

The bacteria that cause pneumococcal disease are spread by coughing, sneezing or close contact between people. The bacteria get into the nose and throat and may stay there for a long time without doing any harm but sometimes they can invade the lungs or bloodstream causing symptomatic infection. We do not know why some people develop pneumococcal disease when others carry the bacteria harmlessly.



How can it be prevented?

The Polysaccharide Pneumococcal Vaccine (PPV) helps prevent pneumococcal disease.

This vaccine has been given to older people in a number of countries including the UK where it has been used for nearly 20 years to reduce the number of people admitted to hospital with complications of the disease.



Who is at risk?

Everybody is at risk of getting pneumococcal disease, but the very young are more at risk and also as we get older our risk increases. In the older population, the older you get the greater the risk. You are particularly vulnerable if you also have a heart or lung condition, have diabetes mellitus, have no spleen or have weakened immune system, for example, if you are having treatment for cancer. So everyone aged 65 and over in the UK is offered a routine pneumococcal jab to protect them.

What are the symptoms of pneumococcal infection?

The symptoms of pneumococcal infection of the lungs are:

- a high fever;
- coughing;
- shaking chills;
- breathlessness;
- chest pains; and
- confusion.

The symptoms of pneumococcal meningitis are:

- a severe headache;
- a stiff neck;
- a high fever;
- confusion; and
- being sensitive to light.

You should contact your doctor if any of these symptoms are causing you concern.



Do I need to do anything to get the jab?

Your GP practice may be in touch with you to make an appointment but if not, contact them and also check that they have got your correct details.

The vaccine can be given at any time of the year and you may be offered it at the same time as your flu jab to save an extra visit. It is okay to have the two jabs at the same time.



Is it possible to get the disease from the vaccine?

No. You cannot get pneumococcal disease from the vaccine as it does not contain live bacteria.

Will there be any side effects?

Side effects are usually mild and don't last for long. You may get some swelling and soreness where you had the injection. Very occasionally you may have a fever or some muscle pain. Serious side effects are very rare.

How often will I need this vaccine?

Most people will only need one dose of the vaccine.

A repeat vaccination every five years will be offered to those:

- whose spleen has been removed;
- whose spleen is not working properly; or
- who have chronic renal disease.



Talk to your doctor or practice nurse if you think this applies to you.

I think I've had this jab. Do I need another one?

Check with your doctor or practice nurse if you think you've already had the jab. You probably don't need another one unless you have one of the conditions listed above.

Do people under 65 need the vaccine?

In the UK babies have pneumococcal vaccinations as part of their routine childhood immunisations but this is a different vaccine, called Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccine (PCV) and is only for young children.

People who are at a higher risk from pneumococcal infection, such as those with other illnesses and medical conditions, are also recommended pneumococcal vaccine under the age of 65 years. These are people with:

- serious breathing problems, including severe asthma needing regular inhaled or oral steroids;
- serious heart conditions;
- severe kidney disease;
- long-term liver disease;
- diabetes;
- immunosuppression due to disease or treatment, for example, chemotherapy or radiotherapy treatment for cancer or long-term steroid use; and
- problems with the spleen, either because the spleen has been removed (asplenia) or doesn't work properly, for example, sickle cell disease.

You are also advised to have a PPV vaccination if you:

- have a cochlear implant;
- have leakage of CSF (cerebrospinal fluid);
- are employed as a welder.

Where can I get more information?

Visit: <http://immunisation.dh.gov.uk> for detailed information.

You can speak to your doctor, practice nurse, district nurse or pharmacist or phone NHS Direct Wales on **0845 46 47**.

Additional copies of this leaflet are available by e-mailing:

ImmunisationLeafletRequests@wales.gsi.gov.uk

This leaflet is available on the Welsh Government immunisation website:

<http://www.wales.gov.uk/immunisation>

Any queries about this leaflet can be addressed to:

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