



About pneumococcal disease

Pneumococcal disease is an infection caused by *Streptococcus pneumoniae* bacteria, also known as pneumococcus. It is especially serious for children and older people and is most common in winter and spring.

Many people, mainly children, carry the bacteria in their nose and throat, where they do not cause any symptoms. However, sometimes the bacteria can spread locally or through blood stream to other parts of the body causing illness.

Pneumococcal disease can be:

- Non-invasive – it can cause middle-ear infection and sinusitis. This type is more common.
- Invasive – this means the bacteria has entered the bloodstream, fluid around brain and spinal cord, or lungs.

Symptoms of the disease depend on where the infection is

Middle-ear

- Pain in ear and poor hearing
- Fever
- Sometimes diarrhea and vomiting

Sinus

- Aching face and headache
- Blocked or runny nose

Lungs (pneumonia)

- Shortness of breath, cough or chest pain
- Fever
- Headache
- Lack of energy or loss of appetite

Bloodstream (bacteraemia or sepsis)

- Fever or chills
- Drowsiness
- Pain

Brain or spinal cord (meningitis)

- Fever
- Headache or stiff neck
- Nausea and vomiting
- Drowsiness

How pneumococcal infection is caught

The pneumococcal bacteria are easily spread from person to person.

This can happen through:

- Coughing and sneezing.
- Contact with mucus from the nose and saliva from the throat.

How to protect against pneumococcal disease

Vaccination is the best way to protect against pneumococcal disease and serious illness.

The pneumococcal vaccine recommended for children protects against 20 different strains of pneumococcal bacteria that cause disease. The vaccine for older adults protects against 21 strains.

Who is recommended a pneumococcal vaccine

Pneumococcal vaccines are recommended for:

- All infants and children under 5 years including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander infants and children.
- People of all ages with specified medical conditions that increase their risk of severe pneumococcal disease.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults aged 25 years and over.
- Older adults aged 65 years and over.

Children and adolescents

All children are recommended to get a dose of pneumococcal vaccine at 2, 4 and 12 months of age.

Older adults

A single dose of pneumococcal vaccine is recommended for adults aged 65 years and over.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are recommended to get a dose of pneumococcal vaccine at 2, 4, 6 and 12 months of age.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults aged 25 years and over are recommended to receive a single dose of pneumococcal vaccine.

People with medical risk conditions

Children and adolescents under 18 years with specific medical conditions may be eligible for extra pneumococcal vaccine doses.

People aged 18 years and over with specified medical conditions that increase their risk of severe pneumococcal disease are recommended to receive a pneumococcal vaccine at diagnosis if they have not already received a dose of the adult pneumococcal vaccine.

Pneumococcal vaccine safety

Vaccines, like other medicines, can have side effects. However, all vaccines used in Australia provide benefits that greatly outweigh their risks.

The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) tests all vaccines, products and medicines before they are approved for use in Australia. After vaccines are given to people, their safety is continually monitored.

Vaccine side effects

Side effects from pneumococcal vaccines are generally mild. These usually last a few days and go away without any treatment.

They can include:

- Mild pain, redness or swelling where the injection was given.
- Occasionally an injection-site lump (may last weeks but no treatment is needed).
- Tiredness or crankiness.
- Mild fever.

Most common side effects are a sign that your body is starting to build immunity against a disease.

Serious side effects, such as severe allergic reactions, are rare. If you have questions or concerns about a reaction to a vaccine, talk with a health professional.

Australian Immunisation Register

Your health professional should always check the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR) before giving you a vaccine. They should also report to the AIR all the immunisations they give to ensure your immunisation history is complete and accurate.

More information

To find out more about pneumococcal disease and vaccines, go to:

- the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing website at health.gov.au/immunisation.
- Australian Centre for Disease Control at cdc.gov.au/diseases/invasive-pneumococcal-disease-ipd.
- Healthdirect at healthdirect.gov.au/pneumococcal-disease.
- your state or territory health department website or trusted health professional.

Where to get pneumococcal vaccines

Vaccination appointments can be booked at a range of health services including:

- General practices
- Local council immunisation clinics (available in some states and territories).
- Community health centres
- Aboriginal health services
- Participating pharmacies

Not all these health services will have free NIP vaccines, and some providers may charge an administration or service fee. Check with your preferred health service to find out if pneumococcal vaccines are available and when you can book your vaccination appointment.

State and territory health department contact numbers:

ACT	02 5124 9800	SA	1300 232 272
NSW	1300 066 055	TAS	1800 671 738
NT	08 8922 8044	VIC	immunisation@health.vic.gov.au
WA	08 9321 1312	QLD	Contact your local Public Health Unit

