



Pneumococcal Disease

What is pneumococcal disease?

Pneumococcal disease is a serious illness caused by the bacteria *Streptococcus pneumoniae* (also called *Strep pneumo*). It can cause pneumonia, meningitis, and bacteremia (blood stream infection). *Strep pneumo* can also cause less serious infections and is the most common bacterial cause of ear and sinus infections.

Who can get pneumococcal disease?

Although anyone can get pneumococcal disease, it occurs more often in young children, the elderly, or in people with other health conditions such as lung, heart, or kidney disease. Others at risk include alcoholics, diabetics, people with sickle-cell anemia, people with altered immune systems such as HIV/AIDS, or those without a spleen (asplenia).

How is pneumococcal disease spread?

Strep pneumo bacteria are spread by direct contact with the saliva or with fluid from the nose or mouth of a person who is sick or carrying the bacteria.

What are the symptoms of pneumococcal disease?

Symptoms may include fever, chills, headache, ear pain, cough, chest pain, confusion, shortness of breath and occasionally stiff neck and eye pain when looking at bright lights. Babies may have poor eating and drinking, low alertness, and vomiting. The symptoms usually start one to three days after infection.

How is pneumococcal disease treated?

Pneumococcal infections can be treated with antibiotics, such as penicillin. Be sure to complete all medications given by your doctor for this illness.

Should people who have spent time near a person sick with pneumococcal disease need medication to protect themselves?

No. People who have spent time near a person sick with pneumococcal disease do not need medication.

How can I prevent getting pneumococcal disease?

Washing your hands is the best way to protect yourself and stop the spread of *Strep pneumo* to others and yourself. Wash dirty hands with soap and water, or use an alcohol-based hand rub.

Is there a vaccine that can help prevent infections?

Yes. There are two vaccines available to help prevent pneumococcal infections: pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV13) and pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine (PPSV23). PCV13 is recommended for all children younger than 5 years old and for adults with certain risk factors. All adults 65 years of age or older, children 2 years or older who are at high risk of pneumococcal disease, and those 19 years or older with risk factors should receive PPSV23. Talk to your doctor of your local county health department for more questions about the vaccine and where you can get it.