

Older Adults Can Get Added Protection Against Pneumococcal Disease This Flu Season

Each year in the United States, about 18,000 adults 65 years or older die and thousands more end up in the hospital because of infections caused by pneumococcal bacteria. Since the 1980s, older adults have been recommended to get the pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine (PPSV23, Pneumovax®23), which protects against blood and certain other pneumococcal infections. CDC now recommends that adults 65 years or older **also** receive the pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV13, Prevnar-13®), which provides added protection against pneumonia caused by pneumococcal bacteria. Getting both vaccines offers the best protection we have available against pneumococcal disease.

Pneumococcal disease is an infection caused by *Streptococcus pneumoniae* bacteria. Pneumococcal bacteria spread from person-to-person through coughing and sneezing. People sometimes have the bacteria in their nose and throat without feeling sick, but can still spread it to other people.

When pneumococcal bacteria spread from the nose and throat to ears or sinuses, it generally causes mild illness. When the bacteria spread into other parts of the body, it leads to severe health problems such as infections of the lungs (pneumonia), blood (bacteremia), and lining of the brain and spinal cord (meningitis). These illnesses can lead to disability like deafness, brain damage, or loss of arms or legs. These illnesses can also be life-threatening.

People with certain health conditions or who are taking medications that weaken the body's immune system are at increased risk for complications from pneumococcal disease. This is why CDC recommends that these adults (19 years or older) get pneumococcal vaccination as well.

Pneumococcal Disease Can Be Deadly

- Pneumococcal pneumonia kills about 1 out of 20 adults who get it.
- Pneumococcal bacteremia kills about 1 out of 5 people who get it.
- Pneumococcal meningitis kills about 3 out of 10 people who get it.

“Thousands of older adults die and many more are hospitalized from pneumococcal disease every year, but many adults aren't aware that there are vaccines that can

prevent it,” said Dr. Anne Schuchat, assistant surgeon general and director of CDC's National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases. “A lot of adults get their flu vaccine this time of year, which is a great time to get pneumococcal and other vaccines as well.”

Having the flu increases your chances of getting pneumococcal disease. You can help protect yourself from both illnesses by getting your flu and pneumococcal vaccines.

Pneumococcal vaccines may be available at private doctor offices, public or community health clinics, or pharmacies. Check with your doctor or pharmacist or use the [Adult Vaccine Finder \(healthmap.vaccine.org\)](https://healthmap.vaccine.org) to help find places that provide pneumococcal vaccines near you.



Most private health insurance covers pneumococcal vaccines. At this time, Medicare part B typically covers only the first dose of pneumococcal vaccine for older adults and pays 100% of the cost of covered pneumococcal vaccines. Check with your insurance provider for details on whether there is any cost to you and for a list of in-network vaccine providers. If you have insurance that supplements Medicare Part B, check with them to see if they cover both recommended pneumococcal vaccinations.

Talk to your healthcare professional to make sure you are up-to-date on flu and pneumococcal vaccination, as well as other vaccines that may be recommended for you based on your age, health condition, job, lifestyle, or other factors.

For more information, visit:

www.cdc.gov/features/adult-pneumococcal/.