

What is the pneumococcal vaccine?

Pneumococcal vaccine is made from part of the coating of pneumococcal bacteria. It is unable to cause pneumococcal infection, but is sufficiently similar to the real bacteria for the body to produce an immune response. This means that if people are later exposed to real pneumococcal bacteria, their body will be able to fight the infection and prevent serious disease developing. One dose protects against pneumococcal infection for up to 10 years. The vaccine is administered by an injection, in a similar way to the flu vaccine.

Most people will only need one injection. A small number of people who are likely to lose immunity rapidly, such as people who do not have a functioning spleen, may need a repeat dose after 5-10 years.

How effective is the vaccine?

Pneumococcal vaccine reduces the risk of infection by:

- 84% in people with diabetes
- 73% in people with chronic heart disease
- 65% in people with chronic lung disease
- 75% in people older than 65 years who do not have a specific problem with their immune system

How do I arrange an appointment for a vaccination if I need it?

Some patients may have been contacted already by their GP practice regarding the arrangements it has in place. In other cases, practices may not have yet contacted patients directly. You should contact your local GP practice who will let you know the arrangements they have in place.

Does the vaccine have side effects?

You may notice some soreness around the injection site, and occasionally people develop a mild fever. Any reactions are generally minor and disappear within a few days. The vaccination does not contain live bacteria and cannot cause an infection.

What about helping others?

If you are aware of an elderly friend or neighbour who would benefit from pneumococcal immunisation, make them aware of the need for vaccination.

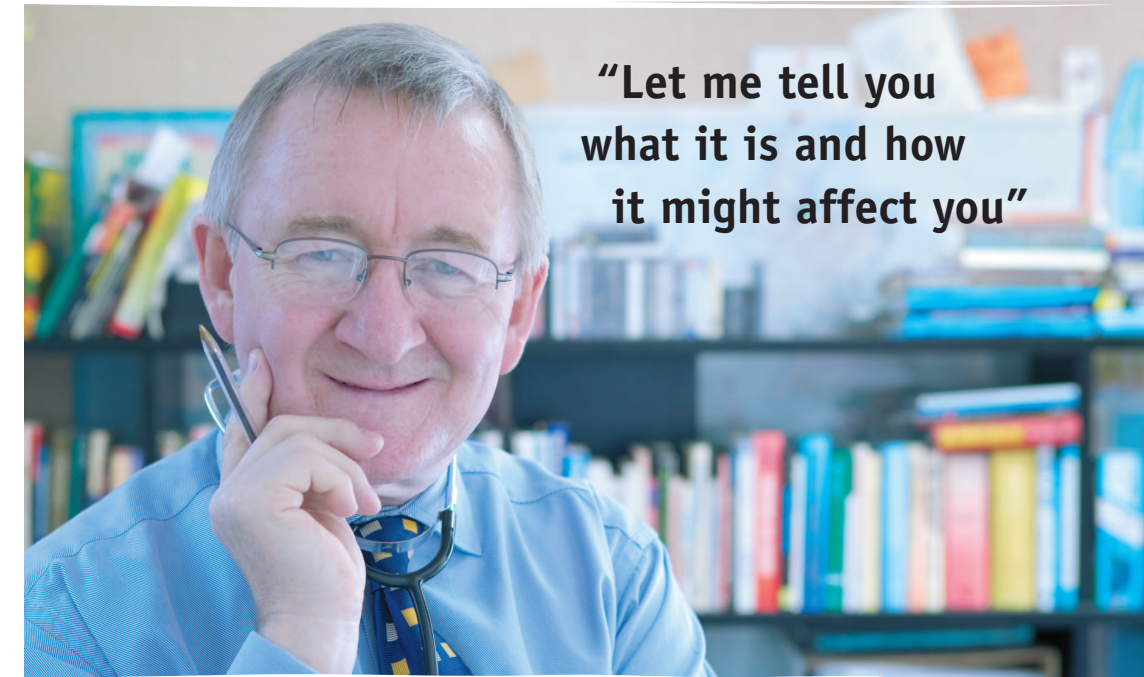
Further copies of this leaflet can be obtained from:

The Scottish Executive Health Department by e-mailing Chris.Sinclair2@scotland.gsi.gov.uk or faxing 0131-244-2157.

You can also visit our website at www.infoscotland.com/flu

For information about health issues and local health services, call the NHS helpline free on 0800 22 44 88 between 8am and 10pm seven days a week.

What's Pneumococcal?



**“Let me tell you
what it is and how
it might affect you”**

www.infoscotland.com/flu



Dr Chris Steele

“Are you 65 or over? Have you had your pneumococcal jab? It’s free and it lasts for up to 10 years, so make an appointment to see your GP for your annual flu jab. This leaflet explains a few of the reasons why it’s so important and whether you’re eligible for it or not.”

This information is for patients who may be eligible for pneumococcal immunisation. It is not directed at healthcare workers.

This leaflet contains information about the pneumococcal infection and pneumococcal vaccination. Please read it carefully and keep it for reference. By following these guidelines you can greatly reduce the risks of pneumococcal infection.

What is pneumococcal infection?

The Pneumococcus is a bacteria which can cause serious illness, such as pneumonia and meningitis. Young children under 2 years old and people over 65 have a higher chance of becoming unwell with pneumococcal infection. However, older people are more likely to suffer serious long term health consequences, including death, from pneumococcal infection.

Why Should I Worry About Pneumococcal Infection?

Pneumococcal infection is the second biggest cause of bacterial meningitis in the UK and Ireland. Pneumococcal vaccination is recommended for certain groups of people who are at greater risk of infection as a result of their age or other predisposing health problems.

Who needs a pneumococcal vaccination?

The vaccine is recommended for many of the same people who receive an annual flu vaccination. Unlike the flu vaccine which is given every year, the pneumococcal vaccine is only usually given once. The Scottish Executive has introduced pneumococcal immunisation for all people aged 65 years and over. For those aged under 65, GP’s may at their own discretion provide immunisation for people with the following serious medical conditions:

- Problems with the spleen either because the spleen has been removed or does not work properly, e.g. sickle cell disorder and coeliac disease
- Serious breathing problems e.g. chronic bronchitis or emphysema
- Serious heart conditions
- Severe kidney disease
- Long-term liver disease
- Diabetes requiring medication
- Lowered immunity due to disease or treatment e.g. HIV, chemotherapy for cancer, or long-term oral steroids for conditions such as asthma
- Cochlear implants
- CSF shunts
- Children under 5 years of age who have previously had invasive pneumococcal disease such as meningitis or bacteraemia

Children under the age of 2 years at increased risk of developing pneumococcal infection are also offered vaccination. In children a different vaccine is used – the conjugate pneumococcal vaccine – as it is more effective in this age group.

If you are not sure about your or your child’s health or need further advice, speak to your doctor, health visitor, practice nurse or pharmacist.

How is pneumococcal infection spread?

Up to 60% of children carry pneumococcal bacteria in the back of their nose and throat, and constantly pass them around by coughing and sneezing and close contact.

Usually this does not result in serious illness. In a susceptible person pneumococcal infection can cause bronchitis, ear and sinus infections, pneumonia, life-threatening infection of the blood (septicaemia), and meningitis.

How serious is pneumococcal meningitis?

About 85% of people who get pneumococcal meningitis recover, usually without any long term problems. However, survivors are more likely to develop complications, including deafness, seizures and long-term brain damage than other bacterial causes of meningitis.

In many cases, the after effects are temporary or improve over time. However, for young children in the early stages of recovery, it can be difficult to tell at first if problems will be long-lasting or temporary.

Why shouldn’t everyone have pneumococcal immunisation?

The maximum risk of serious illness is mainly in those aged over 65 and those under 65 with any of the medical conditions mentioned above.