

# Pneumococcal Disease and the Vaccine (Shot) to Prevent It

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**The best way to protect against pneumococcal disease is by getting the pneumococcal vaccine (also called PCV13). Doctors recommend that all children get the vaccine.**

## Why should my child get the pneumococcal shot?

The pneumococcal shot:

- Protects your child from pneumococcal disease, a potentially serious, and even deadly infection
- Prevents your child from developing pneumococcal meningitis and pneumonia
- Keeps your child from missing school or childcare (and keeps you from missing work to care for your sick child)

## Is the pneumococcal shot safe?

The pneumococcal vaccine is very safe, and it is effective at preventing pneumococcal disease. Vaccines, like any medicine, can have side effects. Most children who get the PCV13 shot have no side effects.

## What are the side effects?

The most common side effects are usually mild and include the following:

- Fussiness
- Sleepiness
- Loss of appetite (not wanting to eat)
- Soreness, redness, and swelling where the child got the shot
- Fever

Doctors recommend that your child get four doses of the pneumococcal vaccine for best protection. Your child will need one dose at each of the following ages:

- 2 months
- 4 months
- 6 months
- Between 12 and 15 months of age



## What is pneumococcal disease?

Pneumococcal disease is an illness caused by bacteria called pneumococcus. It is often mild but can cause serious symptoms, lifelong disability, or death. Children younger than 2 years of age are among those most at risk for the disease.

## What are the symptoms of pneumococcal disease?

There are many types of pneumococcal disease. Symptoms depend on the part of the body that is infected.

Pneumococcal pneumonia (lung infection) is the most common serious form. It causes the following:

- Fever and chills
- Cough
- Rapid breathing or difficulty breathing
- Chest pain

Pneumococcal meningitis is an infection of the covering of the brain and spinal cord. It causes the following:

- Stiff neck
- Fever and headache
- Increased pain from bright lights
- Confusion

In babies, meningitis may cause poor eating and drinking, low alertness, and vomiting.

Blood infection (bacteremia and sepsis) causes fever, chills, and low alertness.

Pneumococcal disease causes up to half of middle ear infections (otitis media). Symptoms are ear pain, a red, swollen ear drum, and sometimes, fever and sleepiness.

## How serious is it?

Pneumococcal disease ranges from mild to very dangerous. About 2,000 cases of serious disease (bacteremia, pneumonia with bacteremia, and meningitis) occur each year in children under 5 in the United States. These illnesses can lead to disabilities like deafness, brain damage, or loss of arms or legs. About 1 out of 15 children who get pneumococcal meningitis dies.

## How does pneumococcal disease spread?

Pneumococcal disease spreads when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Some children may not even feel sick, but they could have the bacteria in their noses and throats. These children can still spread pneumococcal disease.

There are more than 90 types of pneumococcal bacteria. The vaccine called PCV13 protects against the 13 types that cause most of the severe illness in children.

## Do children in the United States still get pneumococcal disease?

Yes. Each year in the United States, pneumococcus causes thousands of cases of pneumonia and ear infections. Babies younger than 2 years of age are most likely to have a serious case of pneumococcal disease.

## How can I learn more about the pneumococcal vaccine and my child?

To learn more about the pneumococcal vaccine, talk to your child's doctor, call 1-800-CDC-INFO or visit [www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, American Academy of Family Physicians, and the American Academy of Pediatrics strongly recommend all children receive their vaccines according to the recommended schedule.