

I'm a Senior. Which Pneumonia Vaccine Do I Need?

What is pneumococcal disease?

Pneumococcal disease is caused by pneumococcus. It is a bacteria. It can infect the lungs (causing pneumonia), blood, and brain. These infections can be serious and hard to treat. Pneumococcus can also cause ear and sinus infections. Some types of this bacteria resist antibiotics.

Am I at risk for pneumococcal disease and pneumonia?

Anyone can get it. But some people are at greater risk. People who are 65 years of age and older are at high risk. So are smokers and people who abuse alcohol. Conditions that put people at high risk are:

- lung, heart, or liver disease, and diabetes
- immune system impairment (e.g., cancer, HIV, immune disease, no functioning spleen, chronic steroid medication such as prednisone, sickle cell disease, chronic renal disease, organ transplant)
- cochlear implant or cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) leak

What pneumococcal pneumonia vaccines are available?

Prevnar 13 and *Pneumovax 23* are available. They cover different types of pneumococcus bacteria, with some overlap.

Do I need both Prevnar 13 and Pneumovax 23?

If your **immune system is impaired**, you need **both** vaccines.

What if my immune system is healthy?

Pneumovax 23 is recommended. *Prevnar 13* is also recommended. However, new evidence suggests that *Prevnar 13* may not be necessary for some seniors. This isn't because *Prevnar 13* doesn't work well...it does. It is because the infections prevented by *Prevnar 13* are now less common in our communities. This is due to years of vaccinating children with *Prevnar 13*.

The CDC is looking at this new evidence and may change their recommendations about *Prevnar 13* later this year. Speak with your healthcare provider if you have any questions.

What else can I do to prevent pneumococcal disease and pneumonia?

- Get a flu shot every year. (Getting the flu ups your risk of pneumococcal disease and pneumonia.)
- If you smoke, stop.
- Stay healthy. Control lung disease (e.g., asthma, COPD), heart disease, and diabetes.
- Wash your hands often. Practice good hygiene.

[This handout may not cover all possible information. It does not replace the need for professional medical care. Always follow the instructions from your healthcare provider.] [September 2019; 350901]