What is Pneumococcal Disease?

Pneumococcal disease is caused by the bacteria *Streptococcus pneumoniae*. Types of Invasive Pneumococcal Disease (IPD) include meningitis (infection of the membranes around the brain and spinal cord) and bacteraemia (infection of the blood). *Streptococcus pneumoniae* can also cause non-invasive illness such as otitis media (infection of the middle ear) and pneumonia (infection in the lungs).

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms depend on the type of infection and the age of the person**.** They may include:

Meningitis – fever, headache, neck stiffness, nausea, vomiting, and drowsiness.

Pneumonia – shortness of breath, fast breathing, fever, lack of energy, headache, chest pain, and cough.

Bacteraemia – fever, muscle aches and pains, lack of energy and drowsiness.

How is it spread?

The bacteria usually live harmlessly in the throat of healthy people. Occasionally the bacteria can cause an infection. The bacteria are passed from person-to-person via droplets, by direct oral contact or indirectly via toys and other items freshly soiled with respiratory secretions.

Who is most at risk?

People most at risk of IPD include:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;
- the elderly;
- children under two years of age;
- people with a suppressed immune system;
- people with medical conditions such as lung disease, heart disease, cancer, kidney disease or HIV infection; and
- people whose spleen has been removed or doesn't work properly.

Pneumococcal infections can occur at any time of year but are more common in winter and early spring.

How is it diagnosed and treated?

Your doctor can diagnose pneumococcal disease by the symptoms, a physical examination, and ordering some tests. Tests may include a chest x-ray, and taking samples to look for the bacteria in the infected part of your body (e.g. blood or cerebrospinal fluid). Pneumococcal disease is treated with antibiotics.

What if I have been in contact with someone with the disease?

There is no treatment recommended for people who have been in contact with someone with the disease. However, people who have a suppressed immune system (e.g. people on chemotherapy) should consult their doctor.

Immunisation recommendations

Children under 5 years of age living in the ACT

A vaccine to protect children against IPD is offered to all children at two, four and six months of age as part of the funded National Immunisation Program (NIP).

Children under 5 years of age with high-risk underlying medical conditions also require booster doses at 12 months and 4-5 years of age. These booster doses are also funded under the NIP. Please see your immunisation provider to discuss the relevant vaccination recommendations for your child.

INFORMATION

Adults and older children

Pneumococcal vaccination is recommended and funded for:

- All people aged 65 years and older;
- All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 50 years or older;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 to 49 years with high-risk underlying medical conditions.

Non indigenous adults *without* underlying medical conditions generally require only one dose at 65 years of age or older.

Pneumococcal vaccination is also recommended but not funded for non indigenous adults and older children with high-risk underlying medical conditions. The number of doses and timing of vaccination varies, depending age and type of underlying medical condition.

Please see your doctor to discuss the current vaccination recommendations relevant to you.

Need more information?

For more information about Invasive Pneumococcal Disease, contact your doctor or call the Health Protection Service, Communicable Disease Control Information Line during business hours on **(02) 6205 2155.**

Communicable Disease Control Section at Health Protection Service *is responsible for the investigation and surveillance of notifiable or infectious conditions in the ACT in order to control or prevent their spread in the community. This includes the promotion of immunisation, education and other strategies that help to limit the spread of diseases.*

Invasive Pneumococcal Disease is a notifiable disease. Cases notified to ACT Health are investigated by Public Health Officers.

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