Pneumococcal Shot

What is the pneumococcal shot?

The pneumococcal shot protects you against the bacteria called pneumococci. These bacteria can cause dangerous infections in the blood and brain.

Pneumococcal disease can happen after an upper respiratory tract infection, such as a cold or the flu. The risk of a serious infection is especially high if you have a chronic disease or are over age 65.

Who should have the shot?

The pneumococcal shot is recommended for all adults 65 and older. Your healthcare provider may also recommend the shot if you are younger than 65 and:

- You have a long-term health problem, such as asthma, diabetes, heart or lung disease, sickle cell disease, or liver disease.
- You don't have a spleen or your spleen is damaged or you have another problem that makes it harder for your body to fight infection, such as leukemia, kidney failure, and HIV/AIDS,
- You have had an organ transplant.
- You are taking a medicine or having treatment that lowers your ability to fight infections, such as long-term steroid use, cancer medicine, or radiation therapy.
- You are an alcoholic.
- You are a smoker.
- You live in a nursing facility or long-term care facility.

If you have had 1 or more pneumococcal shots before age 65, you should get another pneumococcal shot if you are now 65 or older and it has been more than 5 years since your last shot.

Check with your healthcare provider before getting the shot if you:

- Are ill or have a fever
- Are pregnant
- Are allergic to an ingredient in the vaccine
- Have had a severe allergic reaction to a vaccine

Does the shot cause side effects?

After getting this shot you may have redness, soreness, or swelling in the area where you had the shot. This usually lasts just a day or two. Rare side effects include fever or muscle aches that may last a few days. Serious problems, such as severe allergic reactions, are very rare.

You cannot get pneumococcal infection from the shot.

What else should I know about this shot?

The pneumococcal shot does not protect you from getting sick right away. Within 2 to 3 weeks after getting the shot your body will make enough special cells (antibodies) to fight the pneumococcal bacteria.

You can get the shot at your healthcare provider's office or at most local health departments. The cost of the shot is covered by Medicare and most state Medicaid insurance. It may be covered by private health insurance, depending on the reasons you are getting it. Check with your insurance company.

You can have a flu shot and a pneumococcal shot at the same time without increasing side effects. Check with your healthcare provider about other shots you may need.

You can get more information from:

- National Coalition for Adult Immunization
  1-301-656-0003
  http://www.nfid.org
- American Lung Association
  1-800-586-4872
  http://www.lungusa.org

You can also get information from your local health department.

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