

Pneumococcal Disease

COMMUNICABLE DISEASE CONTROL

Pneumococcal is pronounced NEW-MOW-COK-AL.

What is pneumococcal disease?

It's a bad infection caused by bacteria (or germs) called *streptococcus pneumoniae*.

About four out of 10 people have the pneumococcal germs in their mouths and throats. For most healthy people, the germs don't cause serious illness.

For some people, especially those aged 65 years and older and those with certain medical problems, the germ can cause:

- blood poisoning (bacteremia)
- infection of the fluid surrounding the brain and spinal cord (meningitis)
- pneumonia

All of these can lead to hospitalization and sometimes death.

How common is pneumococcal disease?

Laboratory tests show that about 90 Manitobans get pneumococcal disease each year, but the real number may be higher. Of the laboratory-confirmed cases, 29 per cent occur in those aged 65 years or older.

What is the pneumo shot ?

- A vaccine is also called a needle, shot or immunization. Vaccines help the immune system learn how to recognize the germs that cause diseases and fight them.

- The pneumo shot is an inactivated (killed virus) vaccine that contains protection against 23 types of *streptococcus pneumoniae* bacteria.
- Because the vaccine does not contain "live" germs, it cannot cause pneumococcal disease.

Why is the pneumococcal vaccine (or pneumonia shot) important?

The pneumonia shot can prevent pneumonia and other infections caused by 23 types of the *streptococcus pneumoniae* bacteria.

If 10 people get the pneumococcal vaccine, about six of them will be protected from bacteremia and meningitis. The vaccine may also protect against pneumonia.

Who should get the pneumonia shot?

Manitoba Health provides the pneumonia shot free to people in the following high-risk groups:

1. Anyone 65 years of age and older.
2. People who live in a personal care home or a chronic care facility.
3. Anyone two years of age and older who has a high-risk health problem such as:
 - chronic heart disease
 - chronic lung disease (except asthma)
 - cirrhosis of the liver or alcoholism
 - chronic kidney disease
 - chronic fluid leak of the brain/spinal cord
 - diabetes

- a spleen that does not work well because of sickle-cell disease, inflammatory bowel disease, celiac disease, thalassemia, lupus, or low platelet levels of an unknown cause
 - no spleen
 - diseases that make the immune system weak (such as generalized cancer, HIV/AIDS or Hodgkin's disease)
4. Anyone who is receiving treatment or drugs that weaken the immune system (ex: high-dose steroids, chemotherapy, radiation).

How is the vaccine given?

The vaccine is given by needle into the muscle or into the tissue below the skin, usually in the upper arm.

Is a second dose needed?

- Only people at very high risk need to have a second dose.
- A second dose, if recommended, isn't needed until three to five years after your first. The need for a booster and the time you get it depends on factors such as your health condition and your age. Your doctor or public health nurse can tell you if you need a second dose.

Can the pneumo shot be given at the same time as other vaccines?

Yes. It is safe to get more than one kind of vaccine at a clinic visit. Many people who get the flu shot also need one dose of pneumo shot. You can get both shots at the same time, one in each arm. This will not increase the side effects.

When should I get the vaccine?

- As soon as you turn 65 years old.
- As soon as you develop a high-risk health problem (such as the ones listed above).
- As soon as you move into a personal care home or chronic care facility.

Who should NOT get this vaccine?

- Children under two years of age. The vaccine does not work for this age group.
- People who had a bad allergic reaction to the pneumonia shot when they got it in the past.
- Anyone who has a severe allergy to any vaccine ingredients or its container. Vaccine content and packaging varies by manufacturer. Check with the public health nurse or the doctor if you are not sure about getting the vaccine.

Having a mild illness, such as a cold (with or without a fever) is NOT a reason to avoid having this vaccine. If you are at risk and do not know if you have received a dose, you should get vaccinated.

What are the side effects?

- The vaccine is very safe. About half the individuals who get this vaccine may feel a bit of soreness and have redness or swelling at the place where the needle went into the skin. This may last from one to three days.
- A very small number of individuals may experience a fever of 38.5°C or higher, general muscle pain or a headache. These symptoms usually occur soon after the shot was given and last for approximately one to two days.
- Severe side effects may occur but these are rare. These include:
 - a severe allergic reaction (hives, wheezing, shortness of breath, swelling of the face, mouth or throat; low blood pressure causing loss of consciousness),
 - a hard and sore lump where you got the needle,
 - a drop in platelet levels for a short time in people who have low platelets due to an unknown cause.

If you have one of these rare side effects or any other that you are concerned about, please report it to your doctor or public health nurse. Vaccine reactions are recorded and monitored in Manitoba and across Canada.

What should I do if side effects occur?

Fever can be treated by:

- keeping the room temperature at about 18°C;
- removing clothing;
- encouraging rest and liquids, such as watered-down apple juice or flat soft drinks;
- taking acetaminophen (Tylenol® or Tempra®). **Never give acetylsalicylic acid (ASA or aspirin) to children.**

Also, a cool damp cloth may help ease minor pain where the needle was given.

Where can I get the pneumo shot?

You can get it from your family doctor or at a public health clinic all year round, including when you get your flu shot in the fall. Some doctors' offices may charge a fee for supplies.

Your record of protection

Make sure the doctor or nurse gives you a card that says you have had the pneumonia shot. Keep the card in a safe place.

In Manitoba, vaccination is voluntary.

Recommended resources:

Available on the Internet:

- Government of Manitoba – Public Health Branch
www.gov.mb.ca/health/publichealth/index.html
- Division of Immunization and Respiratory Diseases – Public Health Agency of Canada
www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/dird-dimr/index.html
- Canadian Coalition for Immunization Awareness and Promotion – Canadian Public Health Association
www.immunize.cpha.ca/

- National Immunization Program – Centres for Disease Control and Prevention – USA
www.cdc.gov/nip/
- Immunization Action Coalition
www.immunize.org/

Information about the shots that you or your children receive may be recorded in the Manitoba Immunization Monitoring System (MIMS). This computerized database allows your doctor, your child's doctor or your public health nurse to find out what shots you or your child have had or need to have. Information collected in MIMS may be used to produce vaccination records, or notify you or your doctor if someone has missed a particular shot. Manitoba Health may use the information to monitor how well different vaccines work in preventing disease.

If you need information on the shots that you or your child has received, contact your doctor, your local public health unit or nursing station.

If you have any questions or concerns, contact your doctor, local public health nurse; or Health Links-Info Santé in Winnipeg at 788-8200 or toll-free at 1-888-315-9257 or access our website at www.gov.mb.ca/health/publichealth/index.html.

Local Public Health Unit Stamp

