

Pneumococcal Disease

Fact Sheet



Maine Center for Disease
Control and Prevention
An Office of the
Department of Health and Human Services

Paul R. LePage, Governor

Mary C. Mayhew, Commissioner

What is pneumococcal disease?

Pneumococcal disease is caused by the bacteria *Streptococcus pneumoniae*. The disease is most common in the winter and spring, but it may occur at any time of the year. This disease may cause serious illness if it is in the lungs, blood, or in the lining of the brain and spinal cord. It is also a common cause of ear infections.

What are the signs and symptoms?

Signs of disease may include: high fever, chills, cough, shortness of breath, earaches, feeling generally poorly, stiff neck, headache, and mental confusion.

How is it spread?

The disease is spread from person to person by coughing, sneezing, or contact with respiratory droplets. The bacteria that cause the disease can live in the nose and throat of healthy children and adults without making them sick.

How serious is pneumococcal disease?

It can be very serious in young children and older adults. Brain and learning problems, hearing loss, and even death can occur during or after infection.

Who gets pneumococcal disease?

Anyone can get this disease. People at highest risk include:

- Children under 2 years and those in daycare
- People 65 years of age and older
- People with certain chronic medical problems or weak immune systems

How is it treated?

This disease is treated with antibiotics. People with severe illness may need to be treated in a hospital.

How can I prevent this disease?

The best way to prevent this disease is to get vaccinated against the disease. Washing your hands and covering your cough and sneezes with your sleeve can also help protect you and others.

Who should get the vaccine?

Two vaccines are available to prevent this disease.

1. Pneumococcal conjugate vaccine:
 - All children from 6 weeks to 5 years
2. Pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine:
 - All adults 65 years of age or older
 - Anyone 2 years of age or older with long term health problems such as diabetes, leaks of cerebrospinal fluid; heart, lung (not including asthma), kidney, or liver disease; or alcoholism
 - Adults 19 and older who smoke or have asthma
 - People who live in nursing homes or other long-term care facilities

Adults should review their need for vaccine at every visit with their healthcare provider, especially at 50 and 65 years of age.

Where can I get more information?

For more information contact your healthcare provider or local health center. You can also contact the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention by calling 1-800-821-5821 or visiting the website <http://www.mainepublichealth.gov>. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website - <http://www.cdc.gov> – is another excellent source of health information.