Pneumococcal Disease:
Facts About Pneumococcal Disease in Adults

" *I'm committed to helping reduce pneumococcal disease among US adults because over the years, I have seen too many lives cut short by this disease.* "

—Mark Metersky, MD
University of Connecticut School of Medicine

What is pneumococcal disease?
Pneumococcal disease is an infection caused by common bacteria called "pneumococcus" [noo-muh-kok-uhs]. It can lead to severe illnesses like pneumonia, meningitis, and blood infections (bacteremia).

Is it dangerous?
Pneumococcal disease is serious and deadly. Pneumococcal meningitis and blood infections kill thousands of Americans each year. Most of these deaths are in adults. For those who survive, these infections can lead to hospitalization, long recovery time, and devastating health problems such as hearing loss, seizures, blindness, and paralysis.

Pneumococcal pneumonia is also dangerous. As many as 175,000 people are hospitalized each year with it and some of these patients will have a heart attack or heart failure as a result.

What are the symptoms?
Pneumococcal disease can strike quickly and without warning, but symptoms are not the same for everyone. Depending on whether the infection causes pneumonia, blood infection, or meningitis, people may have some combination of the following:

- *abrupt onset of fever*
- *shaking/chills, cough*
- *shortness of breath*
- *chest pain*
- *stiff neck*
- *disorientation*
- *sensitivity to light*

How do people get pneumococcal disease?

Pneumococcal bacteria spread through coughing or sneezing or through direct contact, such as kissing. Not everyone who carries the bacteria becomes ill, so it's possible to "catch" pneumococcal disease from someone who appears healthy.

Who can get pneumococcal disease?

Anyone can get pneumococcal disease, but those age 65 and older and younger adults with certain chronic health conditions are more likely than others to get it. They are also at greater risk for serious illness.

Is there anything I can do to keep from getting pneumococcal disease?

Getting vaccinated can help prevent pneumococcal disease. Medicare and most private insurance companies pay for vaccination for patients who need it. It's also important to get an influenza vaccination every year because having the flu increases the chances of getting pneumococcal disease.

Which adults need pneumococcal vaccination?

CDC currently recommends pneumococcal vaccination for:

- All adults age 65 and older

- Adults age 19 through 64 years with lung, heart, liver, or kidney disease; asthma; diabetes; alcoholism; immunocompromising conditions; cancer; a damaged or missing spleen; cochlear implants; or cerebro-spinal fluid (CSF) leaks

- Adults living in nursing homes or other long-term care facilities

- All adults who smoke cigarettes

There are two types of pneumococcal vaccines available for adults: a pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine (PPSV23) and a pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV13).

Adults with any of the following need to receive both vaccines: immunocompromising conditions (eg, HIV/AIDS, leukemia, lymphoma, and Hodgkins disease); a damaged or missing spleen; cochlear implants; or CSF leaks.

Other adults who are recommended for pneumococcal vaccination only need PPSV23, but may need more than one dose. For more information, speak with your healthcare professional.

Are there side effects from vaccination?

Mild side effects such as redness or pain at the injection site may occur. Very rarely, fever, muscle aches, or more severe reactions may develop.

For more information, speak with your healthcare professional or visit Adultvaccination.org.