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Pneumococcal Vaccines for Older Adults (65+ years of Age)

You can protect yourself against pneumonia and its health dangers. Pneumococcal vaccines can help you avoid getting sick.

Pneumococcal bacteria are a common cause of pneumonia, which is an infection of the lungs. Almost 1 million people ages 65 or older are hospitalized with pneumonia each year. Around 30 percent of older adults treated for pneumonia will die.

Everyone ages 65 and older should get vaccinated.

Especially if you are at high risk, such as:

- Nursing home residents
- People with heart disease, diabetes, asthma, lung disease, HIV, or other chronic health problems.

Two kinds of pneumococcal vaccines are available for people aged 65 and older:

- Pneumococcal conjugate vaccines (PCV15, PCV20 or PCV21).
- Pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine (PPSV23). The table below lists the vaccine recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for all adults 65 years or older. Your healthcare provider will help you figure out which are the right vaccines for you to receive.

Pneumococcal Vaccine Recommendations for Older Adults 65 years or older

Category	Recommendation
Adults 65+ who have not previously received any pneumococcal vaccine or their pneumococcal vaccination history is unknown	One dose of PCV20, PCV21, or PCV15. • If PCV20 or PCV21 is used, pneumococcal vaccination is complete. • If PCV15 is used, it should be followed by 1 dose of PPSV23 at least 1 year later.*
Adults 65+ who have received only PPSV23 at any age	• Administer one dose of PCV20 or PCV21 at least 1 year since the last PPSV23 dose
Adults 65+ who have previously received only PCV13	• 1 dose PCV21, PCV20, or PPSV23 at least 1 year after the last PCV13 dose
Adults 65+ who have previously received both PCV13 and PPSV23 but PPSV23 was received before 65 years of age	• 1 dose PCV20 or PCV21 at least 5 years after the last pneumococcal vaccine **OR** • 1 dose of PPSV23 at least 5 years after the last pneumococcal vaccine
For adults 65+ who have received PCV13 at any age and PPSV23 at or after 65 years	• Shared clinical decision-making between patient and provider on whether to administer PCV20 or PCV21 • If decided PCV20 or PCV21 is appropriate, give PCV20 or PCV21 at least 5 years after last pneumococcal vaccine

*If you have an immunocompromising condition, cochlear implant, or cerebrospinal fluid leak, the PCV15 and PPSV23 doses can be given a minimum of 8 weeks apart

Side Effects

Most people who get a pneumococcal vaccine do not have any serious problems with it. Most side effects are mild, meaning they do not affect daily activities. These side effects usually go away within about 2 days.

Side effects following PCV15 or PCV20 can include:

- Redness, swelling, or pain where the shot was given
- Fever
- Loss of appetite
- Irritability
- Feeling tired
- Headache
- Muscle aches or joint pain
- Chills

Side effects following PPSV23 can include:

- Redness, swelling, or pain where the shot was given
- Pain
- Feeling tired
- Fever
- Muscle aches

The vaccine is likely to be available for free. If you have Medicare Part B, the vaccine is free if your health care provider accepts Medicare. Medicaid and private health insurance plans also often cover vaccine costs.

Vaccines are available at:

- Most drug stores
- Your healthcare provider

Background

Pneumococcal vaccines can prevent you from getting illnesses caused by pneumococcal bacteria. Pneumococcal bacteria can cause pneumonia, ear infections, sinus infections, and meningitis.

Pneumonia is a serious disease that infects the air sacs of your lungs. This can cause the sacs to fill with fluid or pus. As a result, you may develop a cough, fever, chills, and trouble breathing.

Symptoms can be mild, or severe enough for you to need hospitalization.
These symptoms include:

- Coughing. Sometimes you can cough up greenish, yellow, or even bloody mucus
- Fever, sweating, and chills
- Rapid, shallow breathing
- Sharp or stabbing chest pain that gets worse when you cough or breathe deeply
- Loss of appetite, low energy, and fatigue
- Confusion, especially in older adults

Get help right away

If you have any pneumonia symptoms, get medical help right away. Pneumonia can quickly become life threatening for older adults—especially those with other health conditions or a weakened immune system.

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The AGS Health in Aging Foundation is dedicated to improving the health, independence, and quality of life of all older people. We aim to empower older adults and caregivers to actively participate in their health care and decision-making.

DISCLAIMER: This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other healthcare provider. Always consult your healthcare provider about your medications, symptoms, and health problems. September 2024

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