



## Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccine

Pneumococcal disease is the main cause of bacterial meningitis (an infection of the covering of the brain) in the United States. Each year, pneumococcal disease causes many health problems in children younger than 5 years of age, including these problems:

- More than 700 cases of meningitis
- About 13,000 blood infections
- About 5 million ear infections

Children younger than 2 years of age are at highest risk for serious disease. Pneumococcal disease causes about 200 deaths each year in children younger than 5 years of age.

### **What is the pneumococcal vaccine?**

Pneumococcal conjugate vaccine is a shot for infants and toddlers. It helps prevent pneumococcal disease, and it also helps stop the disease from spreading from person to person.

The vaccine's protection lasts at least 3 years. Because most serious pneumococcal infections happen during the first 2 years of life, the vaccine protects children when they are at greatest risk. (Some older children and adults may get the pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine—a different vaccine used to prevent pneumococcal disease.)

### **Why should my child get this vaccine?**

Pneumococcal conjugate vaccine can prevent pneumococcal disease. Pneumococcus bacteria are spread from person to person through close contact. Pneumococcal infections can be hard to treat because the disease has become resistant to some of the medicines that have been used to treat it. This makes preventing the disease even more important.

### **Who should get the pneumococcal conjugate vaccine and when?**

All children younger than 2 years of age should get this vaccine. Healthy infants and toddlers should get 4 doses of pneumococcal conjugate vaccine:

- One dose at 2 months of age
- One dose at 4 months of age
- One dose at 6 months of age
- One dose at 12 months to 15 months of age

Children who miss the first dose at 2 months of age should still get the vaccine. Ask your doctor for more information.

Pneumococcal conjugate vaccine is recommended for children between 2 years and 5 years of age who:

- Have sickle cell disease
- Have a damaged spleen or no spleen
- Have HIV/AIDS
- Have other diseases that affect the immune system, such as diabetes or cancer
- Take medicines that affect the immune system, such as chemotherapy or steroids

This vaccine should also be considered for use in all other children between 2 years and 5 years of age, but especially those who:

- Are younger than 3 years of age
- Are Alaska natives, Native Americans or blacks
- Attend group child care

The number of doses a child needs depends on the how old the child was when he or she started getting the shots. Ask your doctor for more details.

### **Are there some children who should not get pneumococcal conjugate vaccine or who should get it when they are older?**

Children should not get pneumococcal conjugate vaccine if they had a severe (life-threatening) allergic reaction to a previous dose of the vaccine.

Children who are moderately or severely ill at the time the shot is scheduled should usually wait until they recover before getting the vaccine. Children with minor illnesses, such as a cold, may be vaccinated.

### **What are the risks from pneumococcal conjugate vaccine?**

In clinical trials, pneumococcal conjugate vaccine was associated with only mild reactions, such as:

- Tenderness or swelling where the shot was given
- Mild fever
- Fussiness
- Tiredness or poor appetite
- Vomiting

A vaccine, like any medicine, could cause serious problems, such as a severe allergic reaction. The risk of this vaccine causing serious harm or death is extremely small. If you have concerns, talk to your doctor.

### **What if my child has a moderate or severe reaction? What should I look for?**

Look for any unusual condition such as a serious allergic reaction, high fever or unusual behavior. If a serious allergic reaction is going to happen, it will happen within a few minutes to a few hours after the shot. Signs of a serious allergic reaction include the following:

- Difficulty breathing
- Hoarseness or wheezing
- Hives
- Paleness
- Weakness
- A fast heartbeat
- Dizziness
- Swelling of the throat

### **What should I do if my child has a reaction?**

- Call a doctor or take your child to a doctor right away.
- Tell your doctor what happened, when it happened and when the vaccination was given.
- Ask your doctor, nurse or health department to file a Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS) form, or call VAERS yourself at 800-822-7967.

**For more information about this subject please check:**

**The Center for Disease Control at [www.cdc.gov/](http://www.cdc.gov/)**

**The American Academy of Pediatrics at [www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org)**