

Pneumococcal Disease

Frequently Asked Questions

What is pneumococcal disease?

Pneumococcal (new-mo-cah-call) disease is caused by the *Streptococcus pneumoniae* bacteria. This bacteria is commonly found in the nose and throat. It may cause infection of the lungs (pneumonia), the blood (bacteremia), the membrane that covers the brain (meningitis) and the middle ear.

Infections occur most often during the winter and early spring when respiratory illnesses are more common. Every year thousands of people need hospital treatment and many die because of pneumococcal disease. Pneumococcal disease is a leading cause of pneumonia in adults and pneumonia, blood infection and ear infection in children.

Who gets pneumococcal disease?

Anyone can get pneumococcal disease. Those at highest risk include infants and young children, adults 65 years and older, people with chronic health conditions and weak immune systems.

How is pneumococcal disease spread?

The bacteria are spread through contact with people who are ill or who carry the bacteria in their throat. It is common for people, especially children, to carry the bacteria in their throats without becoming ill from it. People can spread these germs to others by coughing, sneezing or contact with respiratory secretions.

What are the symptoms of pneumococcal disease?

The most common symptoms of pneumococcal disease include:

- Chills
- Fever
- Chest pain
- Shortness of breath
- Cough
- Stiff neck

How is pneumococcal disease diagnosed?

If a healthcare provider suspects pneumococcal disease, samples of the patient's sputum (mucus coughed up from the lungs), blood or spinal fluid will be examined.

What is the treatment for pneumococcal disease?

Early treatment with antibiotics is usually effective. However, there are strains of the bacteria that are resistant to some antibiotics in the United States. (NOTE: It is very important to finish your antibiotics even if you begin to feel better, unless otherwise directed by your health care provider.)

Can pneumococcal disease be prevented?

There are two vaccines to prevent pneumococcal disease. Both vaccines are safe and reduce the likelihood of developing the disease. Vaccination is recommended for people age 2 and older with chronic health conditions and weak immune systems, adults 65 years and older, and people living in nursing homes or other long-term care facilities.

Where can I get more information?

- Your health care provider
- Your local health department
- NJ Department of Health www.nj.gov/health
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention www.cdc.gov

This information is intended for educational purposes only and is not intended to replace consultation with a health care professional. Adapted from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.