Pneumococcal Polysaccharide Vaccine

Getting vaccinated is the best way to protect against some very serious infections. **The National Advisory Committee on Immunization** strongly recommends routine immunization. This vaccine protects adults and children two years of age and older against pneumococcal infections like pneumonia. This type of vaccine (polysaccharide) should not be given to children under two years of age. A different type of pneumococcal vaccine (conjugate) is given to infants and younger children.

What causes pneumonia?

One type of bacteria that can cause an infection is called Streptococcus pneumonia (or pneumococcus). Four out of 10 healthy people have pneumococcal bacteria in their mouth, nose and throat without becoming ill.

When these bacteria enter the body they can cause pneumococcal pneumonia, which is an infection of the lungs. These bacteria can attack the blood cells and cause a serious disease called bacteraemia. They can also attack the covering of the brain and spinal cord causing meningitis.

Why is the vaccine important?

Pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine can prevent pneumonia and other infections cause by 23 types of the Streptococcus pneumoniae bacteria. These 23 types account for approximately nine out of 10 cases of pneumococcal disease. The vaccine is recommended for people with certain medical conditions listed below, and people 65 years of age and older.

About eight out of every 10 cases occur in these high-risk groups. The vaccine protects about 50-80% of people against pneumococcal infection. Vaccination also makes the disease milder for those who may become infected.

Who should get the vaccine?

Pneumococcal vaccine should be given to anyone 65 years of age and older, as well as adults and children two years and older who have any of the following high-risk medical conditions such as chronic heart, kidney or lung disease (except asthma), nephrotic syndrome, cirrhosis of the liver, alcoholism, diabetes, mellitus, chronic cerebrospinal fluid leak, HIV infection and AIDS or other diseases that suppress the immune system, absence of or disorders of the spleen and sickle cell disease.

When should the vaccine be given?

The best time to get the pneumococcal vaccine is as soon as you develop a high-risk medical condition or when you turn 65. The pneumococcal vaccine can be given at any time of the year. The pneumococcal vaccine is normally given just once in your lifetime. Only a few people will need a second dose of the pneumococcal vaccine. Your doctor will know if you need another dose.

Are there side effects?

Some people have side effects from the vaccine, but these are usually minor and last only a short time. It is quite common to have some swelling and soreness in the arm where the needle was given. Occasionally slight fever may occur. Other side effects, such as headache, a high fever or fatigue may occur, but these are rare.

Who should not have the vaccine?

- Children under the age of two.
- Persons who have had an allergic reaction to a previous pneumococcal vaccine.
- Persons who have had a previous pneumococcal vaccine should talk to their health care provider.
- Persons who have a known allergy to any component of the vaccine.
- Persons who are acutely ill with fever should delay being vaccinated.
- Women who may be pregnant or breastfeeding should discuss this with their health care provider.
- Persons who have Hodgkin's disease and have received extensive chemotherapy and/or nodal irradiation.

Record of Protection

After you/your child receive any vaccination, make sure the doctor/nurse updates your copy of the vaccination record card. In addition, please report the vaccination to the Public Health Unit.

For more information, please contact a member of the Vaccine Preventable Disease Team by calling the Haldimand-Norfolk Health Unit at 519-426-6170 or 905-318-6623.

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