

Is the Pneumococcal Vaccine Right for Me?

By Grace Yu, MD

Streptococcus pneumoniae, or pneumococcus, is a common bacterium that often causes pneumonia leading to hospitalization. It can also cause severe illnesses such as bacteremia (blood stream infection), meningitis, heart infection and joint infection. Each year, there are thousands of pneumococcal infections in the United States. People older than 65 and/or with chronic diseases that lower their immunity are at higher risk for pneumococcal infections. Pneumococcal vaccine (commonly known as the “pneumonia” vaccine) is the best way to help protect against the bacterial infection by reducing the cases of infection and by decreased the severity of the illness.

There are many different types of Streptococcus pneumoniae and the vaccines provide protection against the most common types. Currently, there are two pneumococcal vaccines available in the United States: PPSV23 (Pneumovax®) and PCV 13 (Prevnar 13®). They target different strains of the bacteria. PPSV23 protects against 23 types of pneumococcal bacteria and

PCV13 protects against 13 types. The vaccines are recommended based on age and health conditions.

Adults who should receive both PPSV23 and PCV 13 are:

- Anyone age 65 or older
- Anyone younger than age 65 with health conditions which put them at high risk for pneumococcal infections including:
 - Cerebrospinal fluid leak
 - Cochlear implant
 - Absent or poor functioning spleen
 - HIV
 - Chronic kidney failure
 - Leukemia
 - Lymphoma
 - Multiple myeloma
 - Metastatic cancer
 - Solid organ transplant
 - Taking drugs that suppress immunity (including chronic corticosteroid use)
 - All immunodeficiency states.

Adults aged 19 to 64 with the following conditions should receive PPV23 alone:

- Smoker
- Asthma
- Diabetes mellitus
- Chronic heart, lung and liver disease

The timing of the vaccine is important as the two should not be given at the same time. For adults older than 65 who have not had either of the pneumococcal vaccines, it is recommended to get PCV13 first followed by PPSV23 at least one year apart. For those who had received PPSV23 prior to age 65 should receive a one-time revaccination with PPSV23 at least five years after the previous dose. Currently, revaccination with PCV13 is not recommended.

Pneumococcal infection often occurs as a serious complication of influenza. Therefore, getting yearly influenza vaccine will also help to protect against severe illness caused by Streptococcus pneumoniae.

As always, check with your provider to determine what is right for you!

Welcome Dr. Tung

Board certified internist, Prineet Tung, MD, has joined Thunderbird Internal Medicine at our suite F-1 office in Glendale. She brings years of experience from both a group practice and an outpatient Veterans Affairs outpatient clinic where she helped patients manage acute and chronic conditions.

Dr. Tung earned her medical degree at Patna Medical College in India before completing her internal medicine residency at Banner Good Samaritan Medical Center. She likes to spend her free time with her boys and enjoys hiking, traveling and reading.



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