

Ministry of Health

Vaccine Fact Sheet: Pneumococcal Vaccine Program for Individuals Aged 6 Weeks and Older

This document is intended for informational purposes only. It is not intended to provide medical or legal advice.

Importance of getting immunized with pneumococcal vaccines

Pneumococcal vaccines can prevent illness caused by many types of pneumococcal bacteria, which can cause serious and life-threatening infections like:

- Meningitis (infection of the lining of the brain)
- Septicemia (infection in the blood)
- Pneumonia (infection of the lungs)

More commonly, pneumococcal bacteria can cause:

- Otitis media (ear infections)
- Sinusitis (sinus infections)

Most pneumococcal infections are mild but can invade parts of the body that are normally bacteria-free. When this happens, a serious disease called invasive pneumococcal disease (IPD) can develop, which can cause serious symptoms, lifelong disability or even death. Meningitis, septicemia, and pneumonia caused by IPD can be fatal.

What pneumococcal conjugate vaccines protect against

The pneumococcal conjugate (Pneu-C) vaccines have been approved for use by Health Canada and are safe and effective products that protect against up to 20 different types of bacteria that cause pneumococcal disease. Vaccines protect you by building antibodies against a disease. The vaccines are provided for free to eligible individuals as part of the Ontario's publicly funded immunization program.

How pneumococcal disease is spread

Pneumococcal bacteria are very common. Many people have them in their nose and throat without getting sick, but they can still spread the bacteria through infected mucus or saliva. You may come in contact with infected mucus or saliva by:

- being near an infected person who coughs or sneezes
- having close contact with an infected person (for example, kissing or hugging)
- touching objects that were recently exposed to an infected person's mucus or saliva (such as shared utensils, cups, tissues or toys) and then rubbing your eyes, nose or mouth

Risk of pneumococcal disease

Anyone can get pneumococcal disease, but children under 2 years old, people with certain medical conditions or other risk factors, and adults 65 years or older are at the highest risk.

Publicly funded pneumococcal conjugate vaccines in Ontario

Type of Vaccine	Vaccine Name	Abbreviation
Pneu-C	Vaxneuvance	Pneu-C-15
	Prevnar 20	Pneu-C-20

Eligibility criteria for Pneu-C vaccines

Eligibility	Vaccine	# of doses	Schedule
6 weeks to 4 years of age who are not at increased risk for IPD	Pneu-C-15	Up to 3 doses	2, 4 and 12 months of age
6 weeks to 4 years of age with certain medical and non-medical conditions that increase their risk for IPD	Pneu-C-20	Up to 4 doses	2, 4, 6 and 12 months of age
5 years of age and older with certain medical and non-medical conditions that increase their risk for IPD	Pneu-C-20	Up to 4 doses	
65 years of age and older who are not at increased risk for IPD	Pneu-C-20	1 lifetime dose	

Catch-up immunizations are available to those who miss their scheduled doses. Children at increased risk for IPD who have not yet received Pneu-C-20 vaccine are eligible for at least one dose of Pneu-C-20 vaccine. All other individuals who have previously received all eligible publicly funded doses of pneumococcal vaccines based on their age and risk of IPD may not be eligible to receive additional doses of pneumococcal vaccines. Speak with your health care provider to determine your vaccine eligibility and schedule.

Vaccine safety

Pneu-C vaccines are approved for use by Health Canada, and they are safe. They are not only used in Canada but are used worldwide. Pneu-C vaccines have been used in Ontario's publicly funded immunization programs for more than 20 years.

Every approved vaccine must be shown to be safe and effective before it is approved for use in Canada. Once approved, vaccine safety is continuously monitored.

Possible reactions after receiving the vaccine

Many people have no side effects from Pneu-C vaccines. For those that do, they are usually mild and last one to two days. Serious side effects are very rare.

Common reactions to Pneu-C vaccines may include:

- Soreness, redness and/or swelling where the vaccine was given
- Fever
- Drowsiness
- Loss of appetite
- Headache
- Muscle or joint ache
- Chills
- Fussiness (irritability) - infants only

People sometimes faint after medical procedures, including vaccination. Tell your provider if you feel dizzy before, during, or after getting vaccinated and they can take extra precautions to ensure your safety.

As with any medicine, there is an extremely rare possibility (less than one in a million people) of a life-threatening allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. Signs of anaphylaxis can include hives, swelling of the face and throat, difficulty breathing, a fast heartbeat, dizziness, or weakness. For this reason, it is important to remain at your health care provider's office for at least 15 minutes after you have received your Pneu-C vaccine. If anaphylaxis occurs, you will be given medicine to treat the symptoms.

Any unexpected or serious reaction to a vaccine should be reported to your health care provider or local [public health unit](#).

Managing side effects of the vaccine

To help with soreness and swelling, put a cool, wet cloth over the area where you had the needle.

There is medicine to help with a fever or pain. Check with a health care provider if you are not sure what medicine or dose to take. Follow the directions on the package.

Some people with health problems, such as a weak immune system, must call their health care provider if they get a fever. If you have been told to do this, call your health care provider even if you think the fever is from the vaccine.

What to do if a serious problem occurs

An allergic reaction could occur after someone leaves the place of vaccination. If you see signs of a severe allergic reaction (hives, swelling of the face and throat, difficulty breathing, a fast heartbeat, dizziness, or weakness), call **9-1-1** and get to the nearest hospital.

For other signs that concern you, call a health care provider.

Adverse reactions should be reported to a health care provider or your local [public health unit](#).

When not to get the vaccine or when to delay immunizations

Speak with your health care provider if you have had a severe allergic reaction to a previous dose of pneumococcal vaccine or to any component of the vaccine including

In some cases, your health care provider may decide to postpone pneumococcal vaccine immunization until a future visit. People with minor illnesses, such as a cold, may be immunized. People who are moderately or severely ill should usually wait until they recover. Your health care provider can give you more information.

Vaccine record

Your health care provider should document your immunization in your Yellow Immunization Card. Please keep your Yellow Immunization Card in a safe place and bring it with you each time you receive a vaccine from your health care provider.

Privately purchasing vaccine for those that are not eligible for publicly funded Pneu-C vaccine

If you do not meet eligibility criteria for the publicly funded Pneu-C vaccine, you can speak to your health care provider to determine if the vaccine would be appropriate for you. The vaccine would need to be privately purchased; however, if you have a private insurance plan, you may connect with them to determine if Pneu-C vaccine is covered.