

Pneumococcal Disease- Factsheet

What is pneumococcal disease?

Pneumococcal disease is the name for any infection caused by the bacteria *Streptococcus pneumoniae*. Pneumococcal infections can range from ear and sinus infections to pneumonia, meningitis, and bloodstream infections. *Streptococcus pneumoniae* is commonly found in the respiratory track of healthy people without causing illness. Invasive bacterial infections occur when *Streptococcus pneumoniae* invade sterile body sites, such as the blood, cerebrospinal fluid (fluid that lines the hollow spaces of the brain and around the spinal cord), etc., causing severe, life-threatening infections.

What are symptoms of pneumococcal disease?

Symptoms depend on the part of the body that is infected and generally appear within 1 to 3 days. Most pneumococcal infections are mild (ear and sinus infections); invasive infections can be deadly or result in long-term problems. Symptoms may include an abrupt onset of fever and chills, cough, chest pain, difficulty breathing, stiff neck, headache, sensitivity to light, and confusion.

How is pneumococcal disease spread?

Anyone can get a *Streptococcus pneumoniae* infection. The bacteria spreads from person to person by direct contact with respiratory secretions such as mucus and saliva from someone who is sick.

How long are people contagious?

The length a person is contagious is unknown and it may be as long as the organism is present in respiratory droplets but often less than 24 hours after antibiotics are administered.

Who is at risk for pneumococcal disease?

Children younger than 2 years old and adults 65 years or older are at increased risk. Certain medical conditions and other risk factors can also put people at increased risk for pneumococcal disease. Risk factors include alcoholism, chronic heart, lung, kidney, or liver disease, cochlear implant, cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) leak, diabetes, HIV infection, cancer, solid organ transplant, taking medicine that weakens the immune system, damaged or no spleen, and cigarette smoking.

What treatment is available?

Early diagnosis and treatment are important for serious pneumococcal infections. Antibiotics can help treat severe illnesses caused by pneumococcal bacteria.

Do infected people need to be kept home from school, work, or daycare?

People who are sick should stay home until they feel well enough to return and have not had a fever for 24 hours. People with invasive infections often will need hospital care.

How can I protect myself and my family from getting a pneumococcal infection?

Vaccines are the best way to prevent pneumococcal disease. CDC recommends pneumococcal vaccination for all children under 5 years old. Adults 65 years or older should be vaccinated if they have never received a pneumococcal vaccine before. If you are at increased risk for pneumococcal disease, talk to your doctor about which pneumococcal vaccines you need and when.