Do I need a pneumococcal vaccine?

Your doctor is recommending that you get a pneumococcal vaccine, but you're wondering if it's absolutely necessary.

Sure, shots are never fun, but pneumococcal vaccines can prevent you from getting illnesses caused by pneumococcal bacteria. This type of bacteria can cause pneumonia, ear infections, sinus infections, and meningitis.

Pneumococcal pneumonia symptoms include:

- Coughing
- Difficulty breathing
- High fever
- Shaking and/or chills
- Chest pain

To help prevent that, your doctor may recommend two different pneumococcal vaccines.

PPSV23 – The Pneumococcal Polysaccharide Vaccine

PPSV23 protects against 23 types of bacteria that cause pneumococcal disease. Your doctor will recommend this vaccine if:

- You are 65 years or older.
- You've already had a dose of PPSV23 prior to turning 65. Another dose can help to keep you safe.
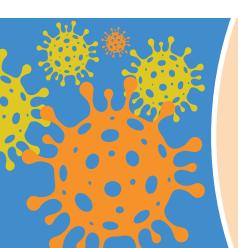
PCV13 – The Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccine

PCV13 protects against 13 different types of bacteria that cause pneumococcal disease. Your doctor will recommend this vaccine if:

- You are 65 years or older.
- You have an immunocompromising condition, a cerebrospinal fluid leak, or a cochlear implant. If you don't, you may not have to have it. However, it's still a good idea to get it anyway to protect yourself from pneumonia.

Adults age 65 and older are **10x more likely to be hospitalized** with the pneumococcal pneumonia than adults **ages 18-49**.

Why are vaccines important?

Vaccines partner up with your body's natural defenses to help you develop immunity to the diseases they protect against. It is possible that you may never contract pneumococcal pneumonia, but the vaccines can act as a safety net if you do. Having both the PPSV23 and PCV13 vaccines when your doctor recommends them can make the difference between life and death should you end up being exposed to pneumococcal bacteria.

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