

Pneumococcal vaccine

The pneumococcal vaccine helps protect against serious illnesses like pneumonia and meningitis. It's recommended for people at higher risk of these illnesses, such as babies and adults aged 65 and over.

What the pneumococcal vaccine is for

The pneumococcal vaccine helps protect against some types of bacterial infections that can cause serious illnesses like:

- meningitis (an infection in the brain and spinal cord)
- sepsis (a life-threatening reaction to an infection)
- pneumonia (an infection in the lungs)

Some types of pneumococcal vaccine can also help protect against other illnesses such as sinusitis and ear infections.

Who should have the pneumococcal vaccine

The pneumococcal vaccine is recommended for babies, older people, and people at higher risk of getting seriously ill from pneumococcal infections.

When the pneumococcal vaccine is given

Who should have it	How many doses
Babies	1st dose at 16 weeks and a booster dose at 1 year
People aged 65 and over	1 dose when you're 65
Children and adults at higher risk of getting seriously ill	At least 1 dose (some people may need extra doses or regular doses)

Contact your GP surgery if you or your child have missed a pneumococcal vaccination.

[Who's at higher risk of getting seriously ill](#)

You're at higher risk of getting seriously ill from pneumococcal infections if you have:

- sickle cell disease, coeliac disease, problems with your spleen or you've had your spleen removed
- a long-term condition that affects your breathing, such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) or cystic fibrosis
- a long-term condition that affects your heart, such as coronary heart disease or heart failure
- chronic kidney disease
- a long-term condition that affects your liver, such as cirrhosis
- diabetes
- a weakened immune system due to a condition, such as HIV, or a treatment, such as steroid medicine or chemotherapy
- a condition where fluid that protects the brain and spinal cord leaks out (cerebrospinal fluid leaks)
- cochlear implants

Some welders and metal workers who are exposed to metal fumes at work should also have the vaccine. Check with your employer if you think you may need it.

Who cannot have the pneumococcal vaccine

Most people can have the pneumococcal vaccine if they need it, including if you're pregnant or breastfeeding.

You only cannot have the vaccine if you've had a serious allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to a previous dose of the vaccine or an ingredient in the vaccine.

Getting vaccinated if you're unwell

If you or your child have a high temperature or feel too unwell to do your normal activities, wait until you're feeling better before having the vaccine.

Pneumococcal vaccine ingredients

There are 2 types of pneumococcal vaccine given in the UK.

You can check the ingredients in the patient leaflets:

- Pneumovax pneumococcal vaccine patient leaflet (Electronic Medicines Compendium website) – usually given to adults and children over 2
- Prevenar pneumococcal vaccine patient leaflet (Electronic Medicines Compendium website; PDF only, 121kb) – usually given to babies under 2

How to get the pneumococcal vaccine

Your GP surgery will usually contact you if you or your child are eligible for the pneumococcal vaccine. This will usually be by letter, text, phone call or email.

If you are a welder or metal worker, speak to your employer about getting the vaccine.

Speak to your GP surgery if:

- you have not been contacted to get the pneumococcal vaccine, but you think you or your child are eligible
- you or your child have missed your pneumococcal vaccinations, or you're not sure if you've been vaccinated
- you or your child are unwell – you may need to wait until you're feeling better before having the vaccine
- you need to change a vaccination appointment

Your GP surgery can book or rearrange an appointment.

Having the pneumococcal vaccine at the same time as other vaccines

You can get the pneumococcal vaccine at the same time as other vaccines, such as the flu vaccine.

Side effects of the pneumococcal vaccine

Like all medicines, the pneumococcal vaccine can cause side effects, but not everyone gets them.

Common side effects

The most common side effects of the pneumococcal vaccine include:

- swelling or pain where the injection was given
- a high temperature
- feeling tired
- loss of appetite

Babies and children may also feel a bit unwell and irritable.

You can give them child's paracetamol or child's ibuprofen to ease any symptoms.

Check the packaging or leaflet to make sure the medicine is suitable for your child, or speak to a pharmacist or doctor if you're not sure.

Ask for an urgent GP appointment or call 111 if your baby:

- is 3 to 6 months old and has a temperature of 39C or higher, or you think they have a high temperature
- has a seizure (fit)
- is unwell and you're worried about them

Allergic reactions

More serious side effects such as a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) are very rare and usually happen within minutes.

The person who vaccinates you will be trained to deal with allergic reactions and treat them immediately.

More about vaccine safety

Find out more about why vaccinations are important and the safest way to protect yourself

How well the pneumococcal vaccine works and how long it lasts

Vaccination gives the best protection against pneumococcal infections.

It helps protect against the most common and serious types of these infections, but there's still a chance you might get a pneumococcal infection.

You usually have some protection by about 3 weeks from when you had the vaccine.

Most adults only need 1 dose of the vaccine for long-term protection. Most babies need 2 doses to protect them.