

# Pneumococcal Polysaccharide 23 Vaccine

Vaccines have saved more lives compared to any other medical intervention. Vaccines help the immune system recognize and fight bacteria and viruses that cause serious diseases.

## Some pneumococcal diseases are vaccine preventable.

- **Pneumococcal diseases** are caused by different types of *Streptococcus pneumoniae* ('strep') bacteria and cause many deaths worldwide.
- Pneumococcal diseases are most common in young children, the elderly and persons who have certain underlying medical conditions or lifestyles.
- These bacteria can cause ear and sinus infections, bronchitis, and serious and life-threatening infections of the lungs (pneumonia), blood (bacteremia) and the lining that covers the brain (meningitis) or death may occur.
- Permanent complications include brain damage and deafness.

## How are pneumococcal bacteria spread?

- Pneumococcal bacteria are spread directly from one person to another through coughing, sneezing, in saliva when kissing, through sharing drinks, or through close face-to-face contact.
- Babies and children can become sick by using soothers, bottles or toys that are used by other children.
- People can pick up the bacteria if they touch surfaces that have the bacteria on them.
- Many people carry pneumococcal bacteria in their nose and throat but do not become sick.
- Children who attend child care centers are **2 to 3 times** more likely to develop pneumococcal disease and ear infections than children who don't attend child care centres.

## How can pneumococcal disease be prevented?

- Be immunized. When you and your child are immunized, you help protect others as well.
- Practice good hygiene (e.g. handwashing).
- Cover your mouth when coughing and your nose and mouth when sneezing to prevent direct contact with droplets from the nose or throat.

## Who can get this vaccine for free?

### Only 1 lifetime dose unless indicated\*.

- Adults 65 years or older **who have not received** a previous dose(s) for any reason.
- Residents of extended or intermediate care facilities.

### Persons 2-64 years with the following conditions:

- Alcoholism
- Cardiac (heart) disease
- Cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) disorders
- Cochlear implant (candidate or recipient)
- Cystic fibrosis
- Diabetes mellitus
- Homelessness
- Illicit drug use
- Neurological conditions that impede the clearance of respiratory/oral secretions
- Pulmonary (lung) disease (excluding asthma, unless on high doses of oral corticosteroid therapy)
- Acquired complement deficiency\*
- Asplenia\* (congenital, acquired or functional)
- Congenital immunodeficiency\*
- Hematopoietic stem cell transplant recipient\*
- Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)\*
- Immunosuppressive medical treatment\* (e.g., chemotherapy, radiation, high dose steroids)
- Liver disease\* (including cirrhosis, hepatitis B and hepatitis C)
- Malignancies/Cancer (must have current diagnosis)\*
- Renal (kidney) disease\*
- Sickle cell disease and other hemoglobinopathies\*
- Solid organ or islet cell transplant candidate or recipient\*

\*Individuals with these specific health conditions have a high risk of getting pneumococcal disease, and are eligible for a second vaccine dose **at least 5 years** after their first dose.

### Important to know:

- This vaccine provides protection against 23 pneumococcal strains. It does not protect against other pneumococcal bacteria strains.

## Who should not get this vaccine?

- Persons who have a serious acute illness, with or without a fever, should delay immunization.
- People who had a serious or life-threatening reaction to a previous dose of any pneumococcal vaccine, or any components of the vaccine.

## What are common reactions to this vaccine?

- **Vaccines are very safe and effective. It is much safer to get this vaccine than to get pneumococcal disease.**
- Temporary pain, redness and swelling where the needle was given.
  - In a few people, this reaction may last up to 10 days.
- Headache, sore muscles, mild fever, nausea and vomiting.
- These mild reactions generally last 1 to 2 days.
- Only treat a fever (at least 6 to 8 hours after immunization) **if** your child is uncomfortable, refusing fluids and not sleeping.

Use **Acetaminophen** (Tylenol®, Temptra®) or **Ibuprofen** (Advil®, Motrin®) to treat fevers and pain in children and adults. **Never give ASA** (Aspirin®) to anyone younger than 18 years old because of the serious risk of Reye's syndrome.

It is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting any vaccine because there is an extremely rare possibility of a life-threatening allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. This may include hives, difficulty breathing, or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips. This reaction can be treated, and occurs in less than 1 in a million people who get the vaccine. **If this happens after you leave the clinic, get medical attention or call 911 right away.**

## Who should you report reactions to?

- Report any adverse or unexpected reactions to your local public health nurse, your doctor, nurse practitioner or call 811 as soon as possible.

## Talk to a public health nurse:

- If you have questions or concerns about you or your child's reaction to an immunization.
- If you or your child had to go to a doctor, a hospital or to a health centre with a symptom that might be related to immunization.

## What does this vaccine contain?

**PNEUMOVAX® 23** contains purified capsular polysaccharides from 23 *Streptococcus pneumoniae* bacterial serotypes (serotypes 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6B, 7F, 8, 9N, 9V, 10A, 11A, 12F, 14, 15B, 17F, 18C, 19A, 19F, 20, 22F, 23F, 33F), sodium chloride, phenol and water for injection. Latex and thimerosal free.

## Mature Minor Consent

It is recommended that parents/guardians discuss consent for immunization with their children. Efforts are first made to get parental/guardian consent for immunizations. However, children at least 13 years of age up to and including 17 years of age, who are able to understand the benefits and possible reactions for each vaccine and the risks of not getting immunized, can legally consent to or refuse immunizations in Saskatchewan by providing mature minor informed consent to a healthcare provider.

Provincial immunization fact sheets are available at [www.saskatchewan.ca/immunize](http://www.saskatchewan.ca/immunize).

**For more information contact your local public health office, your physician, Nurse Practitioner, HealthLine online or by calling 811.**

**References:** [Canadian Immunization Guide](#).  
PNEUMOVAX® 23 (2022) Product Monograph.