



What is pneumococcal disease?

Pneumococcal disease results from infection caused by *Streptococcus pneumoniae* bacteria, also known as pneumococcus. It is especially serious for young children, older people and people with certain risk conditions. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may also more likely to become very ill from pneumococcal disease.

How do you catch pneumococcal infection?

The bacteria is spread between people through coughing and sneezing or coming into contact with mucus from the nose or saliva from the throat. Sometimes the bacteria grow and spread to other parts of the body and cause illness.

Pneumococcal disease can be:

- Non-invasive, such as middle-ear infection and sinusitis. This type is the most common.
- Invasive, which means the bacteria has entered the bloodstream, brain and spinal cord, and lungs.

How common is pneumococcal disease?

Anyone can develop pneumococcal disease. Many people carry the bacteria in their nose or throat where they do not cause any symptoms.

Every year, more than 2000 cases of pneumococcal disease are reported and most people with pneumococcal infection go to hospital. The highest numbers are in infants and children less than 5 years and adults over 65 years.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are also up to 6 times more likely to develop severe pneumococcal disease than non-Indigenous people.

Symptoms of pneumococcal depend on where the infection is

Middle ear

- Pain in ear and poor hearing
- Fever
- Sometimes diarrhoea and vomiting

Sinus

- Aching face
- Headache
- Blocked or runny nose

Lungs (pneumonia)

- Shortness of breath, cough or chest pain
- Fever
- Headache
- Lack of energy or loss of appetite

Bloodstream (bacteraemia or sepsis)

- Fever or chills
- Drowsiness
- Pain

Brain or spinal cord (meningitis)

- Fever
- Headache or stiff neck
- Nausea and vomiting
- Drowsiness

Who should get a pneumococcal vaccine?

Pneumococcal vaccines are recommended for:

- Infants and children under 5 years
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults aged 50 years and over
- Non-Indigenous adults aged 70 years and over
- Children, adolescents and adults with risk conditions for pneumococcal disease

Why should my child get a pneumococcal vaccine?

Vaccination is the best way for people to protect against pneumococcal disease and serious illness. It lowers the risk of serious complications and being admitted to hospital.

The pneumococcal vaccine recommended for children protects against 20 different strains of bacteria that cause pneumococcal disease. Research shows that up to 86% of children who have 3 doses of the pneumococcal vaccine develop enough protection to safeguard against severe illness from pneumococcal disease.

Since pneumococcal vaccines have been included on the National Immunisation Program, there has been an up to 82% drop in invasive pneumococcal disease due vaccination in children aged under 2 years.

How many pneumococcal vaccine doses does my child need?

The recommended number and timing of doses depends on your child's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status and whether they have medical conditions that increase their risk of pneumococcal disease.

Group	Age
All children	2, 4 and 12 months of age
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children	2, 4 and 12 months of age plus an extra dose at 6 months
Children with certain medical conditions	May be eligible for extra doses. Talk to your health professional to see if your child is recommended extra vaccines.

Who can get free pneumococcal vaccines under the National Immunisation Program?

The pneumococcal vaccine is free for people who are at higher risk of serious illness from pneumococcal disease:

- Infants and children under 5 years
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults aged 50 years and over
- Non-Indigenous adults aged 70 years and over
- Children, adolescents and adults with certain risk conditions for pneumococcal disease

People under 20 years old, and refugees or humanitarian entrants of any age, can also receive free catch-up doses if they missed them in childhood.

Where can my child get the free pneumococcal vaccines?

Vaccination appointments can be booked at a range of health services including:

- General practices
- Local council immunisation clinics (available in some states and territories)
- Community health centers
- Aboriginal Medical Services

Not all these health services will have free National Immunisation Program vaccines, and some vaccination providers may charge an administration fee. Check with your preferred health service to find out if National Immunisation Program vaccines are available when you can book your vaccination appointment.

Are pneumococcal vaccines safe?

Clinical trials have proven that pneumococcal vaccines are both safe and effective. Vaccines are like other medicines and can have side effects. However, all vaccines used in Australia provide benefits that greatly outweigh their risks.

All vaccines are rigorously assessed by the Therapeutic Goods Administration and meet high standards before they are approved for use in Australia. They also assess the quality of every batch of vaccine before it is supplied in Australia and continue to monitor them after they are given to people.

What are side effects of pneumococcal vaccines?

Side effects generally mild and temporary and include:

- Pain, redness or swelling where the injection was given
- Occasionally an injection-site lump (may last weeks, but no treatment is needed)
- Tiredness or crankiness
- Mild fever

These usually last for a few days and go away without any treatment. If you have questions or concerns about a reaction to a vaccine, talk with your health professional.

Why did the pneumococcal vaccine schedule change?

The old childhood pneumococcal vaccination schedule was complicated, with different recommendations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in certain states and territories.

The new schedule is now much simpler and is the same across all states and territories. It also recommends just one vaccine that protects against 20 strains of pneumococcal, which is more than the previous vaccine.

When did the pneumococcal vaccine childhood schedule change?

The new childhood schedule started on 1 September 2025.

Will my child still be protected and up to date with immunisations if they got the previous vaccine?

Yes, the previous vaccine and the new one both protect against the most serious strains of pneumococcal. Your child can receive either vaccine, in any order and they will be considered up-to-date for pneumococcal vaccinations.

Where can I find more information?

You can find out more about pneumococcal disease and vaccines, by going to:

- the childhood immunisation website at health.gov.au/childhoodimmunisation
- the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing at health.gov.au/immunisation
- your state or territory health department website or trusted health professional
- HealthDirect at healthdirect.gov.au/pneumococcal-disease
- the Sharing Knowledge About Vaccination website at skai.org.au

State and territory health department contact numbers:			
ACT	02 5124 9800	SA	1300 232 272
NSW	1300 066 055	TAS	1800 671 738
NT	08 8922 8044	VIC	immunisation@health.vic.gov.au
WA	08 9321 1312	QLD	Contact your local Public Health Unit

